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“ MAD SHELLEY ”

“MAD SHELLEY”

*A dramatic life
in five acts*

by
ELMA DANGERFIELD.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

I WISH to acknowledge the kindness of Mr. T. J. WISE in allowing me access to his private Library at Hampstead, also to the late Mr. ROGER INGPEN who read the MS. before he died, and to thank the Officials of the Reading Room at the British Museum, the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and the London Library, for all their courtesy and assistance in my researches of the period.

I would also like to mention that I fully realise the Play as it stands is too lengthy for Stage Production, and would require to be cut considerably before presentation.

A Film Treatment has also been done, and may be obtained on application by any Film Company interested in the subject.

ELMA DANGERFIELD.

SCENARISTS LTD.,
87 VICTORIA STREET,
LONDON, S.W.1.

CHARACTERS

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

DR. BETHEL. (A Schoolmaster)

ETONIANS.

PACKE.

DR. KEATE. (Headmaster)

SIR BYSSHE SHELLEY. (His Grandfather)

MR. TIMOTHY SHELLEY. (His Father)

MRS. SHELLEY. (His Mother)

ELIZABETH SHELLEY } (His Sisters)

HELEN SHELLEY }

HARRIETT GROVE. (His Cousin)

THOMAS JEFFERSON HOGG.

A SCOUT.

MR. SLATTER. (A Bookseller)

THE MASTER.

FELLOWS.

SCHOOLGIRLS.

HARRIET WESTBROOKE. (His Wife)

MISS HAWKES. (A Schoolmistress)

ELIZA WESTBROOKE.

LANDLORD.

CHRISTIE. (A Maid)

LANDLORD'S FRIENDS.

THE MISSES DANCER.

WILLIAM GODWIN. (The Writer)

MRS. GODWIN. (His Second Wife)

JANE (CLAIRE) CLAREMONT. (Her Daughter)

FANNY IMLAY. (His Step-Daughter)

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN. (His
 Daughter)
 INNKEEPER.
 LORD BYRON.
 FLETCHER. (His Valet)
 POLIDORI. (His Italian Physician)
 ITALIAN GARDENER.
 ELISE. (A Swiss Maid)
 MARIA. (A Maid)
 MYSTERIOUS LADY.
 COUNTESS TERESA GUICCIOLI.
 ALLEGRA. (Byron's and Claire's Child)
 COUNT GUICCIOLI.
 EMILIA VIVIANI.
 THOMAS MEDWIN.
 EDWARD WILLIAMS.
 JANE WILLIAMS. (His Wife)
 EDWARD JOHN TRELAWNY.
 TAAFE. (An Irishman)
 TITA. (Byron's Servant)
 LEIGH HUNT.
 MARIANNE HUNT. (His Wife)
 THORNTON HUNT. (Their Son)
 THEIR CHILDREN.
 CAPTAIN ROBERTS. (A Sailor)
 SAILORS.
 HEALTH OFFICER, SOLDIERS, SPECTATORS,
 LADIES, GENOESE, ETC.

ACT ONE

SCENE

- I. THE CLOISTERS AT ETON COLLEGE, 1809.
- II. THE DRAWING-ROOM AT FIELD PLACE, HORSHAM, 1809.
- III. SHELLEY'S ROOMS AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, OXFORD, 1810.

ACT TWO

- I. MRS. FENNING'S ACADEMY FOR YOUNG LADIES, CLAPHAM, 1811.
- II. SHELLEY'S LODGINGS IN GEORGE STREET, EDINBURGH, 1811.
- III. SHELLEY'S LODGINGS IN CONEY STREET, YORK, 1811.

ACT THREE

- I. PARLOUR OF THE GODWINS' HOUSE, SKINNER STREET, LONDON, JULY, 1814.
- II. SALON OF DEJEAN'S "HÔTEL DE L'ANGLETELTERRE", SÉCHIERON, SWITZERLAND, SUMMER, 1816.
- III. SHELLEY'S ROOMS AT NEW BOND STREET, BATH, OCTOBER, 1816.

ACT FOUR

- I. PARLOUR OF THE GODWINS' HOUSE, SKINNER STREET, LONDON, DECEMBER, 1816.
- II. SALON OF LORD BYRON'S VILLA AT LA MIRA, ITALY, SUMMER, 1819.
- III. SALON OF SHELLEY'S TRE PALAZZO DI CHIESA, PISA, SPRING, 1822.

ACT FIVE

- I. SALON OF SHELLEY'S CASA MAGNI, LERICI,
SPEZZIA, APRIL, 1822.
- II. SALON OF BYRON'S PALAZZO LANFRANCHI,
PISA, JULY, 1822.
- III. TERRACE OF THE CASA MAGNI, LERICI,
SPEZZIA, JULY, 1822.
- IV. SEA-SHORE OFF VIA REGGIO, TUSCANY,
AUGUST, 1822.

ACT ONE

SCENE I

THE CLOISTERS AT ETON, AUTUMN

1809

TIME : Late Afternoon in Autumn. As the curtain ascends, SHELLEY, a youth of seventeen, is discovered drawing a circle on the ground in the centre of the Courtyard. He then pours some alcohol into a saucer, sets fire to it, and begins incanting through the flames and smoke.

SHELLEY (*fanatically*) : "Double, double, toil and trouble. . . . Fire burn and caldron bubble!" . . . Demons of air and fire, arise now from the flame and smoke! . . .

[DR. BETHEL, his Tutor, a dull Schoolmaster, and the "butt" of the School, suddenly appears along the Cloisters.

DR. BETHEL (*stopping dead*) : Shelley! . . . What in Heaven's name are you doing?

SHELLEY : Raising the Devil, sir. . . . Wouldn't you like to see him?

DR. BETHEL (*shocked*) : Certainly not.---But how are you trying to raise him?

SHELLEY : By drawing a magic circle on the ground, setting fire to this alcohol in a saucer, and incanting through the flame.

DR. BETHEL (*puzzled*) : But why do you want to raise the Devil?---Haven't you enough proof of his existence in the world already?

SHELLEY (*ironically*) : Ample. I've seen him as a Gentleman—a Statesman—and a Swindler ! —But I want to produce him out of the elements—to see if he has a hoof, tail, and sting !

DR. BETHEL : A most unpleasant idea. . . . Quite enough people produce him already, without the aid of the elements.

SHELLEY : But those are only personal Devils. —This is the real old Gentleman !

DR. BETHEL : What's this deadly looking instrument ?—

[*He touches an electrical jar, and falls back on receiving a shock from it.*]

Good Heavens ! . . . It nearly took my hand off !

SHELLEY (*casually*) : Of course it did.—It was meant to.—It's a highly charged Leyden jar.

DR. BETHEL (*angrily*) : You've no right to have such dangerous things in your possession.—I forbid you to use it again.—You must destroy it at once.

SHELLEY (*horror-stricken*) : Oh, but sir, it was most expensive. . . . I saved up my pocket money to buy it !

DR. BETHEL (*firmly*) : I can't help that.—Your Father shouldn't give you money for such things.

SHELLEY : He doesn't.—He gave it to me for the tuck-shop.—But it's much more stimulating than food.

DR. BETHEL (*severely*) : To you no doubt. But I consider it a most murderous instrument. I shall report the whole matter to the Head at once, and he will deal with you summarily.

SHELLEY (*stubbornly*) : If you think you're going to frighten me out of my chemical experiments, you're very much mistaken, sir.

DR. BETHEL (*ominously*) : I will leave that to Dr. Keate.—As you know, he is quite capable of frightening anybody out of anything !

[*With that* DR. BETHEL *strides angrily away through the Cloisters.*

SHELLEY (*to himself*) : Not me !—If he flogs me between every course of his dinner—as he's in the habit of doing !

[*He is about to continue his incantations, when a small Etonian spys him through the Cloisters, gives the word to another Boy, who whispers and giggles with him, then signals to other stray Etonians who are lounging about the Cloisters. They pass the word "SHELLEY" "Vive Halloo ! . . . SHELLEY !"*

1ST ETONIAN (*whispering from background of Cloisters*) : There he is, the Madman ! . . .

2ND ETONIAN : What on earth is he doing ? . . .

3RD ETONIAN : Raising the Devil, I expect,—like when he put gunpowder in that old tree !

1ST ETONIAN : But what can he want with the Devil ?—What's the use of Him, anyway ?

2ND ETONIAN : How will he get Him laid again, if he does raise Him ? . . .

3RD ETONIAN : Don't be chicken-hearted !—We'll raise Hades for him first.

1ST ETONIAN : Let's bait him.—We always get a rise out of him !

2ND ETONIAN : Come on, Gentlemen !—Lay hands on him, the Atheist !

[*They rush out on SHELLEY, while more ETONIANS join them, and they all surround him.*

3RD ETONIAN : Now we've got you, you maniac !

4TH ETONIAN : We've cornered you now !

5TH ETONIAN : You can't escape from us !

SHELLEY : What do you want with me, anyway ?—Can't you leave me alone ?

1ST ETONIAN : No . . . because you're such good bait !

SHELLEY : Can't you see I'm busy ? . . .

2ND ETONIAN : Yes, with your filthy black magic !

3RD ETONIAN : We'll help them with your dirty work !

4TH ETONIAN : We'll form a magic circle round you which you won't forget ! . . .

[They close round him menacingly.]

4TH ETONIAN : Come on, lad ! Seize anything you can lay hands on !

[They pick up balls of mud, sticks, stones, etc., and start hurling them at SHELLEY. He darts through them, taking refuge against the Châtelain wall.]

SHELLEY *(trying to defend himself)* : Stop it ! . . . Stop it ! . . . You Assassins ! . . .

1ST ETONIAN : Assassin ! That's a good one !

2ND ETONIAN : Assassin yourself !

SHELLEY : Do you want to kill me, you brutes ?

3RD ETONIAN : We shouldn't mind ! . . .

4TH ETONIAN : You'd take a lot of killing, don't worry !

SHELLEY *(seizing a stick in either hand)* : I'd kill you first, though ! If any of you touch me, I'll murder him first !

5TH ETONIAN : Spittire !

1ST ETONIAN : Atheist !

2ND ETONIAN : Madman ! . . . without a hat !
. . . *(laughing.)*

3RD ETONIAN : Have at him, boys ! . . . at him ! . . . at him ! . . .

[They hurl themselves on him, pulling and pinching him, blackening his face. Mad with fury, SHELLEY hits back, defending himself.]

4TH ETONIAN : Take that !

5TH ETONIAN : And that !

1ST ETONIAN : And that !

SHELLEY : You blackguards !—I'll teach you !
. . . *(savagely.)*

2ND ETONIAN : Where's your Devil now to help you ?—

3RD ETONIAN : Call on him now, if you can !—

4TH ETONIAN : Mad Shelley ! . . .

4TH ETONIAN : Where are your Fiends and Spirits now ?

SHELLEY (*shaking*) : Blasphemer ! . . . How dare you ? . . .

5TH ETONIAN : Attack yourself !

[*One of the PACKEs tries to pull SHELLEY'S Coat off his back. He picks him up, and hurls him back into the midst of them.*]

1ST ETONIAN (*shouting*) : Goliath !

2ND ETONIAN : Showing off, aren't you ? --

PACKE (*shouting with pain*) : I'll pay you back for this ! . . .

SHELLEY : I'll do worse to the next boy who dares to touch me !

3RD ETONIAN : Is that a threat ? . . .

4TH ETONIAN : I dare you, Packe !

PACKE (*draxing himself*) : All right ! - I'll take you on ! --

[*PACKE tries to blacken SHELLEY'S Face with his hand. SHELLEY seizes it, and stabs a penknife into it.*]

PACKE (*shouting with pain*) : Blast you ! . . . You've jabbed my hand with your beastly penknife ! . . .

SHELLEY (*triumphantly*) : I meant to ! -- You've done worse to me before now, you great Bullies ! --

PACKE (*shouting back*) : Bully yourself ! --

1ST ETONIAN : Brute ! --

2ND ETONIAN : Swine ! --

3RD ETONIAN : Madman ! --

4TH ETONIAN : Devil ! --

PACKE (*furiously*) : You'll pay for this ! -- You shan't get off Scot Free ! -- I'll tell the Head. -- You'll get Sacked for this ! --

[*DR. BETHEL and DR. KEATE have been watching the whole Scene from behind a Pillar. They*

now come forward. DR. KEATE is a short, thick-set man, resembling a fierce Bull-dog.

DR. KEATE (*secretly*) : Very probably.—But you don't need to inform me, Packe.—Dr. Bethel and I have witnessed the whole proceedings.

[*The Boys fall back sheepishly.*]

Let me see your hand, Packe?—Pooh! a mere scratch!—I don't know what you're whining about? . . .

DR. BETHEL (*whispering*) : He was always a Sniveller, sir.

DR. KEATE (*secretly*) : So it would seem.—Give me that Penknife, Shelley.

SHELLEY (*holding back*) : It's my own property, sir.

DR. KEATE (*thundering*) : Give it to me at once, Shelley.

[*SHELLEY reluctantly hands it over.*]

(*Looking at it*) Ha!—I thought as much!—A murderous-looking Weapon! You could be imprisoned for handling a thing like that, my lad! . . .

SHELLEY (*bravely stepping forward*) : In that case—I'm quite ready, sir.

DR. KEATE (*cynically*) : Not so fast.—We're not going to make a martyr of you yet.—You deserve something more than that.

SHELLEY (*proudly*) : I am prepared for anything, sir——

DR. KEATE (*mockingly*) : Ho! proud as Lucifer I see? . . .

SHELLEY (*haughtily*) : If Lucifer were half so proud, he would have something to be proud of, sir!——

DR. KEATE (*tartly*) : Attempting to raise Him has evidently swollen your head, Young Man.—What you require is rapid deflation! . . .

DR. BETHEL (*severely*) : No doubt you can arrange for that, sir.

DR. KEATE (*ironically*) : I don't anticipate any difficulty.—Gentlemen, you will all present yourselves in my Study immediately after Chapel—No, after the First Course at Dinner, so that I may refresh myself with the Second after dealing with you.—As for you, Shelley—You are Expelled. . . .

SHELLEY (*taken aback*) : Expelled ! . . . For what, may I ask, sir ? . . .

DR. KEATE (*savagely*) : For Impertinence, Damn you.—And for assaulting a School-fellow, with Murderous intent !——

SHELLEY (*defending himself*) : But he assaulted me first, sir !—They all did.——

DR. KEATE (*furious*) : I will hear no Tales out of School.—Dr. Bethel and I witnessed the whole affair—and I consider you are a danger to Human Society ! . . . I hope your Father will be proud of you !

SHELLEY (*boldly*) : I don't care what the old Buck and Killjoy thinks of me ! . . .

DR. KEATE (*sarcastically*) : A true Descendant of your foul-mouthed Grandfather, I see !——

SHELLEY (*loyally*) : A fine old Gentleman, whom I hope to emulate, sir !——

DR. KEATE (*cruelly*) : You will have no difficulty, judging from your behaviour here.—As for your Chemical Experiments, your Soul, no doubt, will soon be as uncomfortable as I intend to make your Body—after Dinner ! The Devil takes care of his own, rest assured !——

[*The Chapel Bell begins ringing.*]

Gentlemen, I will deal with you all after Chapel.—You will remember I have flogged Eighty Boys in one day before now, so I will find no difficulty in giving each of you my personal attention !—after Prayers and Supper.—Into Chapel, all of you.

[*He leads the way, followed by Doc, BRUEL, The Boys shulk behind, muttering, crossly, PACE and SHELLEY bringing up the Rear.*]

PACE (*to SHELLEY*) : You shall pay for this, blast you ! Making us all suffer for your mad pranks ! . . .

SHELLEY (*contemptuously*) : If you weren't such Cowards you'd rebel like I do - against the old Bully - and the whole outrageous system of flogging and flogging ! . . .

PACE (*mockingly*) : And be expelled for our pains - like you, I suppose ? No thanks, a Flogging doesn't have such consequences !

SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : No wonder they say Old Keate could pin and hold a Bull with his teeth ! He is the very Incarnation of the Devil himself ! . . .

[*As they go out*]

THE CURTAIN DESCENDS.

ACT ONE

SCENE II

THE DRAWING-ROOM AT FIELD
PLACE, DECEMBER 1809

As the Curtain ascends the SHELLEY FAMILY are discovered sitting round the fire. MR. TIMOTHY SHELLEY, a tall, fair, slight, good-looking man of 55, is playing Bézique with his wife, MRS. ELIZABETH SHELLEY, a beautiful woman of about 35. SIR BYSSHE SHELLEY (TIMOTHY'S Father), a tall, gouty, dyspeptic old man of 75, is watching cynically. ELIZABETH and ELLEN SHELLEY, two pretty girls of 15 and 16 respectively, are reading and writing in a corner of the room, with their beautiful cousin HARRIETT GROVE.

SIR BYSSHE (*impatiently*) : No, no, Timothy, you fool, that's quite the wrong move !

MR. SHELLEY (*shocked*) : Papa ! . . . please !
—not in front of the Ladies !

SIR BYSSHE (*testily*) : Damn me, Elizabeth's my daughter-in-law, isn't she?—unless you never married her properly—and these are my grandchildren, aren't they?—So, if I can't swear in front of my family, where can I ?

MRS. SHELLEY (*primly*) : Nowhere, I trust, Sir Bysshe—especially not in front of the children.

SIR BYSSHE (*jovially*) : If they never hear worse than that they're lucky !—They ought to come down to the White Swan at Horsham, and take a hand with the Barmaids !

*[He backs the ship, followed by THE BOYER.
The Boys shout behind, uttering on George, PACKE
and SHILLER bringing up the Rear.*

PACKE *(to SHILLER)* : You shall pay for this blast you ! Making us all suffer for your mad pranks ! . . .

SHILLER *(contemptuously)* : If you weren't such Cowards you'd rebel like I do, against the old Bully and the whole outrageous system of flogging and flogging ! . . .

PACKE *(moderately)* : And be expelled for our pains like you, I suppose ? No thanks, a Flogging doesn't have such consequences !

SHILLER *(bitterly)* : No wonder they say Old Keate could pin and hold a Bull with his teeth ! He is the very Incarnation of the Devil himself ! . . .

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SIR BYSSHE (*jovially*) : If they never hear worse than that they're lucky !—They ought to come down to the White Swan at Horsham, and take a hand with the Barmaids !

MR. SHELLEY : Heaven forbid ! You forget, Papa, that Harriett Grove has been entrusted to us by her parents, to be brought up befittingly with Elizabeth and Hellen.

SIR BYSSHE : Befitting for what. I should like to know ? To be a parasite, like most women nowadays, and spend all our money, I suppose ! . . .

MRS. SHELLEY : To be a fitting wife for your grandson and heir, Percy Bysshe.

SIR BYSSHE : Percy ? Ha ! Ha ! I'm sure *he's* the last person to want a fitting wife. He'll probably elope with one or two—like I did !

MR. SHELLEY (*shrewdly*) : On the contrary, Percy is devoted to Harriett ; and a very good match it will make, as she is a considerable heiress.

SIR BYSSHE : I can't see him taking *that* into consideration—in spite of his upbringing. If he's in love with her, it's her person not her property he's after—and a very neat one it is !

MRS. SHELLEY : Pray don't be personal—or coarse, Sir Bysshe. The young ladies are not hard of hearing.

MR. SHELLEY : As well if they were at times, my dear, when their elders are present.

SIR BYSSHE (*crossing over to her*) : What are you scribbling, Elizabeth, tucked away in that corner with Hellen and Harriett ?

ELIZABETH (*covering up the MS.*) : Go away—go away, Grandpap, you're not to look !

SIR BYSSHE : Nonsense, child, I'm too old to be shocked. Are you writing something immoral ?

HARRIETT (*grandly*) : We're writing a novel !

SIR BYSSHE : Then it's bound to be immoral—all the best ones are. What's it called ?

ELIZABETH : "Zastrozzi."

SIR BYSSHE (*sniffing*) : Sounds unwholesome. What's it about ?

HARRIETT : A Robber Chief, a Tyrant, and a Heroine——

SIR BYSSHE : " All purity and tenderness, and elegantly proportioned ". I'll be bound !

ELIZABETH (*taken aback*) : How did you guess ?

SIR BYSSHE : Am I right ?

HARRIETT : That's precisely how Percy described her ! . . .

SIR BYSSHE : Percy ?—What's he got to do with it ?

ELIZABETH : It's all *his* idea——We only do the trimmings.

SIR BYSSHE : The young scoundrel ! Do you hear that, Timothy ? (*Crossing back to card table.*) Percy is writing an improper novel which these children are embellishing !

MR. SHELLEY : It's in the family, of course——

SIR BYSSHE : Impropriety ?—*What* do you mean ? . . .

MR. SHELLEY : No, no, Literary talent. With such letter-writers as Mrs. Shelley and myself, I am not surprised our children inherit it.

SIR BYSSHE : Letter-writers !—Bah !—Preserve me from such Inflictors !

MRS. SHELLEY (*sweetly*) : There is no doubt a place in the world for the Illiterate as well, Sir Bysshe.

SIR BYSSHE (*angrily*) : I can assure you there is, Madam, and a damned good one too !

[*Sound of Horses' hoofs without, and a Coach drawing up outside the windows.*]

MRS. SHELLEY (*looking up*) : What's that ? It sounds like a coach and horses !

MR. SHELLEY : Who on earth can be arriving at this hour of night ? (*Going to Window.*)

SIR BYSSHE (*looking through Window*) : It looks like a hackney coach from Horsham.

ELIZABETH (*peeping out, whispering*) : Harriett !
It's someone with books and baggage ! . . .

HARRIETT : You don't think it can be—— ?

HELLEN : Oh, I wonder if it is ! . . .

MRS. SHELLEY : It must be someone very
improper to call at this hour. --Possibly one of
your friends from the White Swan, Sir Bysshe ?

SIR BYSSHE : Impossible, Madam. They would
be too busy drinking at this time of night.

[*Noise without, the door is thrown open, and
SHELLEY bursts in on them.*

MRS. SHELLEY (*rising*) : Percy ! My child !
How have you got here ? . . .

MR. SHELLEY : What on earth is the meaning
of this, sir ?——

SIR BYSSHE : Where the hell have you come
from, Percy ?——

SHELLEY : Eton—as fast as the stage coach
would bring me !

[*The Girls rush towards him.*

ELIZABETH (*kissing him*) : Percy ! . . . What
a lovely surprise.

HELLEN (*putting her arms round him*) : Darling
Bysshe ! . . . I am pleased to see you !

HARRIETT : Percy ! . . . Have you dropped
out of heaven ! . . .

SHELLEY : When I see you I've dropped into
it, Harriett. . . .

MR. SHELLEY : Will you kindly explain your
conduct at once, sir ?—Why have you left Eton
in this precipitate manner ?

SHELLEY (*coolly*) : I've been expelled, papa.

MR. SHELLEY : Expelled !—What ?—did you
say *expelled* ? . . .

SHELLEY : I did, sir.

MR. SHELLEY (*horrified*) : A son of mine expelled
from Eton ! . . . Oh Heaven ! this is too
much !

MRS. SHELLEY : Percy ! How could you !

ELIZABETH : Bysshe ! How dreadful !

HARRIETT : Percy ! How shameful !

SIR BYSSHE : And for what, may I ask, were you expelled, sir ?

SHELLEY : For assaulting another boy with a penknife.

MR. SHELLEY : How perfectly disgraceful !—you might have murdered him !

SHELLEY : I felt like doing so at the time—only they nearly killed me first.

MRS. SHELLEY : Percy ! How could you ever do such a thing !

SIR BYSSHE (*to himself*) : I could have done it quite easily—given the provocation—which no doubt he had.

MR. SHELLEY : Papa ! How can you condone this recreant, who has brought shame and dishonour on your name ?

SIR BYSSHE : If the name of Shelley hasn't survived worse than this since the Norman Conquest, I should be surprised.

SHELLEY (*gratefully*) : I thought you'd be the only human one, grandpapa.

SIR BYSSHE : My dear boy, I haven't lived in the Colonies, and eloped twice for nothing !

MR. SHELLEY (*pompously*) : You will understand, sir, that as you have been expelled from consorting with gentlemen's sons, owing to your outrageous behaviour, you are now ostracised from associating with your family in any way, for the present.

SHELLEY (*astomished*) : Papa !—You can't mean that ? . . . You don't know what you're saying ? . . .

MR. SHELLEY : I know perfectly well. We cannot have your corrupting influence amongst unsullied young girls.

ELIZABETH : But Papa ! . . .

HARRIETT : Uncle Timothy, please. . . .

HELLEN : Papa ! Please forgive him. . . .

MR. SHELLEY (*thunderingly*) : Silence ! Not another word. I have spoken. I forbid your Mother, your sisters, and Harriett to have any intercourse with you whatsoever, until you return to Eton, or go up to Oxford.

SHELLEY : Return to Eton ! But you can't send me back there !

MR. SHELLEY : There is nothing I cannot do. It is time I asserted my authority. My influence with Dr. Keate is considerable, and I shall communicate with him immediately.

SHELLEY : What about grandpapa ? Is he forbidden to consort with me too ?

MR. SHELLEY : For him, as ever, I can take no responsibility.

SIR BYSSHE : I should think not ! I'm damned if I produced a son to dictate to me in my dotage.

MR. SHELLEY : If you would dictate to your grandson, it would be more becoming.

SIR BYSSHE : I dictate to no one. I abhor Dictators--and Interferers. Whilst Percy is ostracised from family life, I shall humanise him in the White Swan at Horsham.

MR. SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : Which means you will make him drunk every night, without fail !

MRS. SHELLEY : Timothy ! You surely would not allow such a thing ! . . .

MR. SHELLEY : Certainly not, if I can prevent it.--(*To SIR BYSSHE.*)--I will *not* allow my son to become a wine-bibber in a low tap-room !

SIR BYSSHE : And *I* will not allow my grandson to become an outcast and an exile. You forget he is as much my heir as you are, to all these entailed estates and monies----

SHELLEY (*interrupting*) : But I don't want to be heir to anybody--and I don't want any of

them, Grandpapa. I only want a little peace and companionship.

SIR BYSSHE (*patting his shoulder*) : Of course you do—and you'll get that with me and the old cronies at Horsham.

SHELLEY : Thank you, sir—I'm sure I shall.

SIR BYSSHE : When you're tired of polite society you can come and be vulgar with me there. Bless my soul, it's after eight and I have an appointment there at half-past !

SHELLEY : My hackney coach could take you back, sir.

SIR BYSSHE : Good Heavens, no, I shall walk. No extravagances like that for me. My family spend while I hoard—like all good misers who intend to pay for their own funeral, and not be beholden to their son. Good-night, Timothy.—Good-night, Madam.—Good-night, young ladies.—(*Kindly to SHELLEY*) Good-night, Percy—sleep well, my boy.

[*The LADIES all curtsy.*]

SHELLEY : Thank you, sir, if I sleep at all—which I very much doubt.

MRS. SHELLEY : Good-night, Sir Bysshe. I trust you will not be late for your appointment.

SIR BYSSHE : The ale will still be there, in any case, Madam—thank God !

ELIZABETH : Good-night, Grandpa.

HARRIETT : Good-night, Sir Bysshe.

HELLEN : Good-night, Grandpa.

SIR BYSSHE : Good-night, you little crinolines of mischief !

MR. SHELLEY : I will see you to the door, sir, at least.

SIR BYSSHE : If your intelligence was as good as your manners, Timothy, I might disapprove of you less !

[*They go out together.*]

MRS. SHELLEY : Come along at once, children. It's time you all went off to bed. You must obey Papa without delay.

ELIZABETH : But what about "Zastrozzi"—our novel—we can't finish it without Percy? . . .

MRS. SHELLEY : Then it will have to be relegated to limbo, where most novels should be.

SHELLEY (*looking at MS.*) : How far have you got with it, Elizabeth?

HARRIETT (*whispering*) : The tenth chapter—but we're stuck. You must help us out, Percy.

SHELLEY : Of course ; give it to me now.

MRS. SHELLEY (*in doorway, lighting a candle*) : Harriett ! You know you are forbidden to converse with Percy ! Elizabeth and Hellen ! Come along immediately.

ELIZABETH : Yes, Mamma.

HELLEN : Yes, Mamma.

MRS. SHELLEY : Light your candles and follow me to bed. Do you hear me, Harriett?

HARRIETT : Yes, Aunt Elizabeth.

MRS. SHELLEY : And bring that unpleasant book with you to be burnt.

ELIZABETH (*stily handing it to SHELLEY*) : Yes, Mamma.

[SHELLEY hastily hides "Zastrozzi" under a cushion, while HARRIETT, ELIZABETH, and HELLEN troop out after MRS. SHELLEY, carrying other manuscripts and lighted candles.

MRS. SHELLEY (*from doorway*) : I trust you will desist from corrupting your sisters and cousin any further, Percy. You should be content with having led Eton astray, without contaminating your own household.

[*She shuts the door firmly, and SHELLEY is left alone.*

SHELLEY : Very well, Mamma.

SHELLEY (*to himself*) : My Mother seems to imagine me to be on the high road to perdition,

and fancies I want to make atheists of all my little sisters! How laughable! She is a good worthy woman, but resembles the female of the fish and pheasant species, as the only way to placate her is to murder every animal I can see on the place, and call it sport!—If I merely sit down and finish “Zastrozzi” they will say I am mad—like they did at Eton!—But I would rather have my madness than their sanity. . . .

[*He sits down, pulling out “Zastrozzi”.*]

But what a homecoming! What a reception! Almost as bad as my departure from Eton! My Father fierce as a lion, and my grandfather as libidinous as ever! But why should they cut me off from the only beings I love on earth?—Harriett and Elizabeth, and little Hellen? Oh, intolerance, how I hate you! do you not poison the sweetest and most precious relationships in life?—Down with you then!—Down with bigotry and all intolerance!—I will defeat you!

[*As he pores over the Manuscript the door gently opens, and HARRIETT GROVE creeps in, in a dressing-gown, carrying a candle.*]

SHELLEY (*looking up*): Harriett! . . .

HARRIETT (*whispering, finger on lip*): Sh! . . . Sh! . . . They have just gone to bed, so I crept down when all the doors were shut, and no one was looking. . . .

SHELLEY (*impatiently*): But why shouldn't you come? . . . Why can't you talk to me?—It's ridiculous—absurd—they've no right to interfere in our lives like this—and try and come between us!—

HARRIETT: Well, they *are* your Father and Mother, Percy, after all.

SHELLEY (*irritably*): I didn't ask them to be—I didn't choose them—it's only by accident—I have less in common with them than the poorest beggar in the street!

HARRIETT (*horrified*) : Sh ! Sh ! You mustn't say such things—someone might hear you !

SHELLEY (*disrespectfully*) : What if they do ?—It's true, and I'm not ashamed of it. My Mother is a narrow-minded, stupid, worldly woman, and my Father is an old Buck and Killjoy—and a pompous Ass into the bargain !

HARRIETT : Percy ! You horrify me. You speak nearly as disrespectfully of them as you do of the Almighty !

SHELLEY : On the contrary, I have the highest respect for the Almighty—that is, for a First Cause. But because I enquire into metaphysics and philosophy more than the average Christian, and do not believe everything I'm told, I am reckoned an Atheist and an Unbeliever !

HARRIETT : I must admit some of your letters have shocked and surprised me—as they have done my family.

SHELLEY (*amazed*) : Your family !—You don't mean to say you have shown them our correspondence ?—

HARRIETT : I had to. I couldn't understand all your speculative theories and queer ideas, so I asked my Father and Mother to explain them.

SHELLEY (*sarcastically*) : Were they capable of doing so ?—I very much doubt it !—

HARRIETT (*fearfully*) : They said you were an atheist—whatever that may mean—that you lived upon arsenic, aqua-fortis, half an hour's sleep in the night, and that you are desperately in love with the memory of the mad Washerwoman Peg Nicholson, who tried to stab George III with a carving knife !

SHELLEY (*mockingly*) : That's true !—I hope to write some burlesque poetry on her when I go to Oxford.

HARRIETT (*horror-stricken*) : They said your poetry was stuffed full of treason !—

SHELLEY : They are probably right.—

HARRIETT : —And extremely dull.

SHELLEY (*firmly and inquisitively*) : There they are wrong, I can assure you.—What else did they say?

HARRIETT (*terrifiedly*) : That you will either be hanged for it, or clapped into Bedlam ! . . .

SHELLEY (*heatedly*) : And there they are probably right. But oh, how I wish that vile family despotism could not come between the happiness of two people like you and me !—they have no right to try and interfere with us. . . .

HARRIETT : But in any case they have forbidden me to correspond with you further—in fact, to see you at all ! . . .

SHELLEY : And you mean to say you have listened to them?—that you are prepared to obey these monstrous Dictators?

HARRIETT (*primly*) : What can I do ? . . . They are my Father and Mother, and I have a duty towards them, after all.

SHELLEY : Duty ! What a word !—I call it Bigotry and Intolerance ! Why should this vile family despotism come between us and our happiness?

HARRIETT (*hesitatingly*) : But would it be happiness?—that's what I am beginning to doubt.—You are so superior to me in every way, that you would only be disappointed when you realised I am not what you pictured.

SHELLEY (*passionately*) : But you are—you are—you are like one of Raphael's Pictures—or Shakespeare's Women—come to life.

HARRIETT : Only in your imagination—you would be disillusioned when you know how inferior I am.

SHELLEY : Never—never—you are the concrete example of all abstract beauty and virtue, and everything that is lovely.—

HARRIETT : Only in your mind—the Being you love only exists there.—You don't love the real *me*—the human, bodily part—

SHELLEY : I love the *real* you—which is within your lovely little body—I would follow you to the ends of the earth. . . . If you would allow me ? . . .

HARRIETT : No you wouldn't—and when you got there, you would find that I had never existed, except in your imagination. Besides, I have a duty towards my Father.—

SHELLEY : Do you mean to say you will allow that to come between us ? . . .

HARRIETT : What else can I do ?—Besides, I see now we would never be happy together—we are totally unsuited.—My family have shown me that clearly.

SHELLEY : So you have allowed them to prejudice you ?—and I was as convinced of your truth, as I was of my own existence ! . . .

HARRIETT : They have made me realise what a dangerous, sceptical person you are.

SHELLEY : So you abhor me as a sceptic, do you ?—like all the rest—although you were one yourself once !

HARRIETT : I abhor your opinions now, which I consider most dangerous and immoral.

SHELLEY : You are as totally ignorant of my opinions as you are of all enthusiasm—feeling—and emotion.

HARRIETT : And you are ignorant of all sense and decency—and live only on sensations.

SHELLEY : I would rather live on them than on fat, contented ignorance.

HARRIETT (*hesitatingly*) : Then don't ask me to live with you—in fact—I ought to tell you—that I have found someone else whom I consider is more suited to me in every way.

SHELLEY : Indeed !—And who, may I ask, can that be ?

HARRIETT : My cousin, Heylar—

SHELLEY : What ! That clod of earth !—You married to him ? . . . Oh, you are jesting !

HARRIETT (*offended*) : On the contrary, Mr. Helyar is a very tolerable young gentleman—even if he is not as good-looking as you—

SHELLEY : Well, he can't expect everything, can he !

HARRIETT : *And* is a wealthy squire, with fine estates in Dorset ! . . .

SHELLEY : But Harriet, think what will become of *you*. . . . You will become a clod of earth yourself . . . all your fine sensibilities will moulder . . . you will become fit food for the worms !

HARRIETT : I would prefer that, to being food for maniacs like you !

SHELLEY : Oh, Harriett, how can you forsake me after all we have done together ? . . . Did those moonlight walks at Strode and St. Irvings mean nothing to you ? . . .

HARRIETT : They were well enough at the time—but I have outgrown such things—

SHELLEY : I see—you are gone—you are lost to me for ever— You were right—you existed only in my imagination—and now I am left utterly vacant . . . alone . . . with my dreams . . . and illusions.

HARRIETT : Good night, Bysshe . . . I am sorry. . . . I must go back to bed. Shall I light your candle ? It is getting late.

SHELLEY : Late ? Bed ? No ! Good heavens ! . . . I shan't go to bed to-night !

HARRIETT : What will you do ? Where will you go ? Oh, Bysshe, don't look so wild ! . . .

SHELLEY : I shall go out in the snow, and get cold, wet and mad ! . . . anywhere where I can forget you. . . .

HARRIETT : But you can't—you can't—you can't go like this— (*Clutching him.*)

SHELLEY (*wildly*) : Let me go. Where is my pistol ?—I shall go to the Churchyard at Warnham, and sit on the tombs where we used to

sit and tell each other what love was ! . . . Ha !
. . . Ha ! . . . And now I know ! . . . We didn't
know then . . . but now I know ! . . .

*[He rushes out through a window into the night.
HARRIETT runs to the window, calling " BYSSHE !
BYSSHE ! " She flings the curtains aside, showing a
wild, snowy night. The door opens suddenly, re-
vealing MRS. SHELLEY in nightdress and night-
cap.]*

MRS. SHELLEY : Who's there ? . . . Who's
about ? . . . Harriett ! What are you doing here
at this hour ? . . . I thought I heard noises. . . .
Come to bed at once.

HARRIETT : Yes, Aunt Elizabeth,—I came to
get a book.

MRS. SHELLEY : So long as it is not Bysshe's
pernicious book, I don't mind. But I will not
have my house corrupted by him.

HARRIETT (*dutifully*) : No, Aunt Elizabeth.
That is what Papa and Mamma say——
They are afraid he might lead me astray. . . .

MRS. SHELLEY : Quite right, my child, quite
right. And now I will lead the way—follow me
at once—it is high time you were in bed.

HARRIETT (*following her meekly*) : Yes, Aunt
Elizabeth.

*[As they go out she sees SHELLEY standing by the
Window, wild and dishevelled, as the Curtain
descends.]*

CURTAIN.

ACT ONE

SCENE III

SHELLEY'S ROOMS AT UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE, OXFORD

The whole room is in complete confusion, scantily furnished, littered with books, boots, papers, shoes, clothes, electrical instruments, pistols, linen, crockery phials, money, stockings, prints, crucibles, bags and boxes. A College clock strikes Ten as the Curtain ascends, discovering SHELLEY lying asleep on the rug in front of the fire. A SCOUT is laying the table for supper, and endeavouring to tidy the room, but shrugs his shoulders in despair. Suddenly there is a loud knocking on the outside door. The SCOUT goes to it impatiently, and admits THOMAS JEFFERSON HOGG.

HOGG (*through Doorway*) : Is Mr. Shelley in ?

SCOUT (*in a low voice*) : Yes, sir. But he's sound asleep.

HOGG (*surprised*) : Asleep ?—At this time of night ?—But he asked me round to supper at ten.—It's only just struck the hour.

SCOUT : Yes, sir. But you know Mr. Shelley's idea of time ! He's been asleep ever since he got back from his walk with you at six.

HOGG (*stepping in through the Door*) : Then it's high time he woke up.—I'll come in and rouse him myself.

SCOUT (*fearfully*) : Oh, I shouldn't do that, sir. He sleeps so seldom it's nice to see him quiet a

bit, instead of talking and shouting out poetry all the time, and littering the place as soon as I've got it tidy.

HOGG (*coming in further and looking round*) : Well, if this is the best you can do, I shouldn't trouble. It looks more like a pawnbroker's shop than a study !

SCOUT : I know, sir. But I've done my best, and Mr. Shelley says he can't find things if I tidy them up.

HOGG (*sarcastically*) : I shouldn't think he could find himself in this jumble. Have you got supper ready ?

SCOUT : Yes, sir. There's a dish of scalloped oysters on the fire.

HOGG (*smacking his lips*) : Good. But I'll have to tread over Mr. Shelley's prostrate body to get at them, I can see.

[*He proceeds to do so, stumbling over SHELLEY, who wakes with a start, rubbing his eyes violently, and pushing his fingers through his long hair.*]

SHELLEY (*waking up*) : Good heavens ! Who is it ? Do I wake or sleep ?

HOGG : Both !—But it's only me.—I was trying to reach the supper which you invited me to at ten o'clock !

SHELLEY (*horrified*) : What ?—Is it ten ?—I had no idea it was so late. I thought I had just dozed off, and I've slept since six.

HOGG : My dear fellow, you never had any idea of time. You measure it by ideas and sensations, rather than hours or minutes.

SHELLEY (*getting up*) : Time was made for clock-makers—not for poets.

HOGG (*sniffing greedily*) : My stomach is my best time-keeper. Those oysters smell good.

SHELLEY (*looking at them*) : Are they cooked ? Yes, by Jove ! You can go, Scout. We shan't want anything more to-night.

SCOUT (*going to Door*) : Very good, sir. But won't you want me to clear away afterwards ?

SHELLEY : Good gracious, no. You've tidied up my room enough as it is. I shall spend the rest of the evening looking for things, I know. You can go at once. Good night.

SCOUT : Good night, sir. Good night, Mr. Hogg.

[*He goes out veryly, shutting Door after him.*]

HOGG : Good night.—A good Scout that.

SHELLEY : Yes, but thank goodness the fellow's gone. Now we can really spread ourselves. (*Shivering.*) Heavens, I'm cold. Give me the poker and I'll stir up the fire.

[*He does so, upsetting the oysters in the fire.*]

HOGG : Good Lord ! What have you done now ? You are the clumsiest of mortals.

SHELLEY (*apologetically*) : I know—I'm sorry—how could I be so careless ?—How stupid I am with my hands !

HOGG : And then you want to be a Chemist or a Scientist !

SHELLEY (*merrily*) : I'd never do, would I ? . . . But what a delicious mess they've made !

HOGG : But I'd prefer the mess to be in my inside than in the fireplace !—I'm famished.—What on earth are we going to eat now ?

SHELLEY : There's some bread and cheese—which I never touch—so you can eat it all, rind included !—and some Negus. I shall sup off Locke's " Essay on the Human Understanding " !

[*Waving the book.*]

HOGG : You'll do nothing of the kind. (*Sitting down to table.*) You must have your share—even if it isn't a very large one !

[*Looking sideways at a minute piece of cheese.*]

SHELLEY : I hate cheese. It's offensive to my palate, and hurtful to my stomach. But I tell you what, I've got an idea ! . . .

[Suddenly he slices a cardin off the table, tipses round the room, looking under tables, chairs, books, etc. At last, under an electrical machine, he finds a basket of apples, oranges, almonds, raisins, and cake. Triumphantlly he sets it on the table, yet with the air of a penitent making retribution.]

SHELLEY : There ! I thought some dessert might have been sent in a few days ago—apples, oranges, almonds, raisins, and a little cake—I hope they're still eatable !

HOGG : Most welcome, I can assure you, however stale ! Here's to Bacchus and Persephone !
[Raising his glass of Negus.]

SHELLEY : And to "The Necessity of Atheism," which has been on sale to-day for sixpence in the windows of Messrs. Munday and Slatter !

HOGG : I drink to its success—and our future fame !

SHELLEY : And I drink to the overthrow of Intolerance, Bigotry and Cant !

HOGG *[choking over a seven-shilling piece in his mug]* : Good heavens ! What's this ? *[Extracting coin from his mouth.]*

SHELLEY *[laughing]* : Oh, I lost that some days ago. I wondered where it had got to.—We can go and buy another book with it to-morrow.

HOGG : Thank heavens I didn't swallow it !

SHELLEY : You might have become a rich man—and so lost all hope of Heaven !

HOGG : You mean I might have become a dead man—with no hope of anything !

SHELLEY : Why, you're as good an Atheist as I am !—I swallowed some arsenic at Eton when I was experimenting, from which I doubt I shall ever recover !

HOGG : You look remarkably well on it—but I'm not surprised if you lived in this sort of Chemist's Laboratory. I wonder you are alive at all. I shan't dare eat or drink here in future.

SHELLEY : All the better. We'll live on ideas which are far more stimulating.

HOGG : What's that peculiar looking instrument there ?

SHELLEY : It's an electrical apparatus—and if I turn the handle rapidly, crackling sparks fly forth ! Look . . .

[He demonstrates gleefully.]

HOGG (*terrified*) : For Goodness' sake look out, or you'll set the place on fire ! . . .

SHELLEY : Oh no, it's quite fire-proof by now, I assure you. Now I will stand on this stool with glass legs, while you work the machine, until I am filled with fluid, and my hair stands on end !

HOGG (*horrified*) : I refuse—you might go up like a balloon ! . . .

SHELLEY : That's what I want to do ! You don't appreciate the powers of electricity in thunder and lightning !—

HOGG : I prefer them at a distance—in their natural setting in the clouds—not on one's hearth-rug !

SHELLEY : I don't. I prefer them here, where I can master them—I've made an electrical kite at home which can draw down a thunderstorm !

HOGG : But what would you do with it ?—Put it in your pocket ?

SHELLEY : Don't be absurd.—Apply it to some useful purpose, of course. Press a button, and light the whole world !—or warm this arctic country of ours in a twink—a kind of central heating !

HOGG (*incredulously*) : And burn your fingers in the process ! . . . Look how you've burnt the carpet and boards already !

SHELLEY : Oh, they're used to it. The only trouble is catching one's feet in the holes. Look out you don't trip up.

HOGG : Come in, Mr. Slatter. Mr. Shelley is here. Talk of the Devil—I mean, we were just talking of you over our Negus !

[MR. SLATTER *comes in, a common little man, in a great state of excitement.*

MR. SLATTER : Mr. Shelley, Mr. Shelley, your pamphlet on “The Necessity of Atheism” has stirred up a hornet’s nest, after it had only been in my shop window for twenty minutes. . . . You must retract it at once, or I shall be put out of bounds, and perdition will come on both our heads. You will be sent “down”, and I shall lose my livelihood ! . . .

HOGG : Indeed ? And who is the particular hornet who has stung you this time, Mr. Slatter ?

MR. SLATTER : The Rev. John Walker of New College, who dropped in for a theological book, and picked up your pamphlet by mistake !

HOGG (*sniggering*) : He must have got a shock ! . . .

SHELLEY : Providentially, I should say.—He may become a good Athrist instead of a bad Christian, now !

HOGG (*laughing uproariously*) : I wish I could have seen his countenance ! . . . What did he say ?

MR. SLATTER : Bellowed like a bull—as far as his dignity allowed him—sent for Mr. Munday and myself—enquired what poison we were distilling into the youth of Oxford—and ordered us to destroy every copy we could lay hands on !

SHELLEY (*anxiously*) : I trust you did nothing of the kind ?

MR. SLATTER : What could I do ? The Reverend Gentleman seized each copy he could see, strode into my back parlour, and hurled them all into the fire !

SHELLEY (*horrifiedly*) : You mean to say he has destroyed every copy of my precious pamphlet

HOGG (*turning angrily on Mr. SLATTER*) : But you had no right to allow it—you're a Book-seller not an Inquisitor—these are not the Middle Ages, when you can burn books wholesale.

MR. SLATTER (*on his dignity*) : Pardon me, sir, I am a seller of high-class Literature—not of pernicious pamphlets.

SHELLEY (*furiously*) : I never heard anything so iniquitous in my life ! . . . My beautiful pamphlets ! . . . so exquisitely printed . . . committed to the flames like the early Christian Martyrs !

MR. SLATTER : But containing most heretical theories, and pernicious doctrines, Mr. Shelley, if I may say so.

SHELLEY (*fanatically*) : And why should I not have heretical theories, *and* pernicious doctrines, if I choose ? . . . *and* declare them to the world, if I can make it read them ?

MR. SLATTER (*stubbornly*) : I refuse to be the means by which you do.—How can you persist in such strange and absurd notions ?

MR. SHELLEY (*determinedly*) : Because I firmly believe in them, and I glory in the course I have adopted.

MR. SLATTER (*entreatingly*) : I entreat you to see the error of your ways—for your own sake, your friends, your connections. . . .

SHELLEY : What do I care about them ?—What do they care about me ? I have no friends, except Mr. Hogg.—And as for my relations—they regard me as an outcast already . . . a pariah . . . an exile.

MR. SLATTER (*anxiously*) : Nevertheless, I beg you to suppress your pamphlet before it has ruined all our reputations—and deprived me of my Living.

HOGG (*sarcastically*) : Reputation ? . . . What is that ? . . . compared with the Immortality which Mr. Shelley seeks ! As for Living ? . . . Mr. Shelley seems to live on air !

MR. SLATTER (*desperately*) : But I seek a livelihood—which I see slipping from me—I shall be penniless—destitute—

SHELLEY (*shrilly*) : I refuse to suppress it, nevertheless—and in any case, I have sent a copy to every Bishop on the Bench, to the Vice-Chancellor, and the Heads of each House, together with a pretty letter in my own writing signed “Jeremiah Stukeley”.

HOGG (*triumphantly*) : So you see we have done even worse than spread our net in the sight of callow Oxford birds—or shock the susceptibilities of a Fellow of New College !

MR. SLATTER (*wringing his hands*) : Then we are indeed undone—and I dare not answer for the consequences ! . . .

SHELLEY : You will not be asked to.—We are quite capable of dealing with cohorts of reverend Gentlemen !

[*There is a sudden peremptory knocking on the Outside Door.*]

HOGG : That sounds like retribution knocking at the gates, Macbeth !

MR. SLATTER (*nervously*) : Then perhaps you will allow me to depart before it breaks over my head ?—

SHELLEY (*pointing to the Window*) : Most certainly, Mr. Slatter—the Window is quite a short drop, if you are athletically inclined !!

VOICES FROM WITHOUT (*peremptorily*) : Is Mr. Percy Bysshe Shelley at home, may I ask ?

MR. SLATTER (*looking through the Window*) : I would prefer any drop to facing that voice in the flesh !—

(*Whispering*) : It sounds like one of the Masters !

HOGG (*in a hoarse Whisper*) : Make quick your escape then—or you’ll be caught !

[*HOGG helps MR. SLATTER to clamber through the Window into the Courtyard on the other side.*]

SHELLEY (*by the Door*) : Mr. Shelley is at home.—Whom has he the honour to address?

VOICES AGAIN (*angrily*) : Open—in the name of the Master and Fellows of the College!

SHELLEY (*whispering*) : You were right, Hogg.—Retribution in the flesh indeed! . . . (*Opening door.*) Come in, sir, I pray. . . .

[*Holding the door open for them to pass by him, the MASTER enters, followed by three other FELLOWS, all looking formidable.*

THE MASTER (*sternly*) : Am I addressing Mr. Percy Bysshe Shelley?

SHELLEY (*bravely*) : You are, sir.

HOGG (*stepping forward boldly*) : And his compatriot, Thomas Jefferson Hogg.

THE MASTER (*sarcastically*) : Indeed . . . I have heard of you both. . . . These are three Fellows of our College.

SHELLEY (*politely*) : Good evening, Gentlemen. To what, may I ask, do I owe the honour of this visit at this hour?

THE MASTER (*clearing his throat*) : Mr. Shelley, are you the author of this atheistical pamphlet or not? (*Producing the "Necessity of Atheism" out of his Pocket.*)

SHELLEY (*cautiously*) : For what purpose do you put that question?

THE MASTER (*domineeringly*) : Answer me at once.—Are you the author of this, or not?—Yes or no?

SHELLEY (*reasonably*) : Judging from your manner, you are resolved to punish me if I acknowledge it to be my work.—If you can prove it, produce your evidence.—It is neither just nor lawful to interrogate me for such a purpose.—Such proceedings would become a Court of Inquisitors, but not free men in a free country.

THE MASTER (*bullyingly*) : Do you choose to deny, then, that this is your composition?—

SHELLEY (*proudly*) : I deny nothing—and I admit nothing—

THE MASTER (*thunderingly*) : Do you deny it?—that is what I ask?

SHELLEY : Sir—I have experienced tyranny and injustice before, and I know what vulgar insolence is, but I have never met with such unjust and unworthy treatment as this! . . . I am determined not to answer any more questions respecting the publication on the table.

THE MASTER (*saragely*) : Then you are expelled—and I desire you to quit the College early to-morrow morning at latest.

SHELLEY (*astonished*) : Expelled! . . . You mean to say you are expelling me, sir, for not answering your inquisition? . . .

THE MASTER (*handing paper to SHELLEY*) : I am—and here is your sentence of expulsion, duly drawn up and sealed. (*Turning to HOGG.*) As for you, sir, are *you* the author of the preface to this work, or not?

HOGG (*firmlly*) : I refuse to answer any further questions put to me—like Mr. Shelley.

THE MASTER (*furiously*) : Then *you* are expelled too. Here, also, is *your* sentence of expulsion. (*Handing similar document to him.*)

HOGG (*reading paper sarcastically*) : I do not consider my behaviour has justified the word “contumaciously”.—

THE MASTER (*picking up the pamphlet angrily and banging it on table*) : Am I to understand, sir, that *you too* adopt the principles contained in this work? . . .

HOGG (*proudly, moving towards Doorway*) : The last question is still more improper than the former ;—I feel the imputation to be an insult—and since by your own act you have renounced all authority over me, our communication is at an end.

THE MASTER (*imperiously*) : Then I command you to quit my College at an early hour.

HOGG (*haughtily*) : With the greatest pleasure in the world, sir.—You need have no fear of us outstaying ourselves.

(*Opening Door for them*) : Good night, gentlemen.

THE MASTER and FELLOWS : Hah !—Insolent to the last ! . . . “ Good night, sir ! ” Indeed ! . . .

[*He sweeps out, followed by the other FELLOWS. SHELLEY collapses on the sofa reeling with convulsive vehemence, “ Expelled, expelled,” his head shaking with emotion, his whole body quivering.*]

HOGG (*furiously*) : It is monstrous and illegal that any man—or body of men—should dare to do such a thing !

SHELLEY (*passionately*) : What insult ! . . . What brutal indignity ! . . . to hound us forth as though we were contagious lepers !

HOGG (*mockingly*) : We are, in their eyes ! We might contaminate the innocent young Gentlemen of Oxford !

SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : Who spend their time drinking and gambling and carousing, while we write for the benefit of mankind ! . . . Oh, it is outrageous that any men should have the power to do such a thing ! . . . (*Pathetically.*) To cut short our studies and cast us forth on a vast shoreless world ! . . .

HOGG (*contemptuously*) : I pray God I never see any of them again !—to think they eat freely of scholars’ bread, and suffuse themselves with College port !

SHELLEY (*desperately*) : Think of leaving all this !—all our work, our studies !—Packing up our books—our instruments—and going whither—where—what for ? . . .

HOGG (*inspired*) : London—the only place for a free man ! We will catch the stage coach to-morrow after breakfast, at eight o’clock !

SHELLEY (*brightening*) : London ? . . . Yes ! . . . A good idea ! . . . There we shall be free of all this interference ! . . . We will find a quiet room in a back street, and settle down forever to our studies uninterrupted.

HOGG (*anxiously*) : But what about money ?—Have you any left ?—

SHELLEY : Not a penny—and my Father will cut me off after this ! . . .

HOGG (*logically*) : We must borrow some from somewhere—until I can assuage my irate parent.—What about Slatter ?—He might be good for twenty pounds or so.—What do you think ?

SHELLEY : Slatter ? . . . after the trouble we've brought on him ! . . . He's probably bankrupt by now !

HOGG : Nonsense !—He's pretty warm ;—and he's an old friend of your Father's. Go round to his house, and say we must have something for travelling expenses, and to subsist on in London.

SHELLEY : I could leave a written memorandum of the debt, of course. . . .

HOGG (*bustling about*) : Naturally you could—and your Father can repay it in due course ! Go along immediately, while I start packing all this paraphernalia.

SHELLEY (*looking round at everything*) : I don't know which is the most unpleasant—borrowing or packing ! . . . How I hate leaving this room where we've been so happy. . . . Strange I should have said only to-night what a misfortune it would be if we had to quit Oxford ! . . .

HOGG : Negus, my dear fellow—not premonition ! . . . Go along now, or we shall miss the Coach in the morning.

[HOGG begins collecting articles, while SHELLEY puts on a greatcoat, and goes to the door, opens it, and finds the SCOUR on the doorstep.]

SHELLEY (*surprised*) : Scout ! . . . What are you doing here at this hour ?

SCOUT (*nervously*) : Please, sir, I've just heard what's happened. . . . But I've been told by the Master, sir, that if you and Mr. Hogg find it inconvenient to quit the place so suddenly, you may remain for a time, if you ask permission politely ? . . .

SHELLEY (*furiously*) : Permission ! . . . Politely ! . . . Do you hear that, Hogg ? . . . Tell the Master, good Scout, that Mr. Hogg and Mr. Shelley have been so grossly insulted that they would not apply for any concession if their lives depended on it !—From henceforth they will be Free Men ! . . .

[He bursts out wildly, slamming the Door behind him.]

HOGG : If Beggars ! . . . (*Calling through Window.*) Not a penny less than twenty pounds, Shelley ! . . . I can't live on air like you, remember ! . . .

SCOUT : Mr. Shelley don't need no money, sir . . . 'cos he never eats anything except bread and raisins !

HOGG : Well, if he thinks I'm going to live on bread and raisins, he's very much mistaken ! . . . Here, Scout, pack the fruit and cake, for we may be starving by to-morrow ! . . .

[The Curtain Descends as HOGG and SCOUT commence packing.]

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

SCENE I

MRS. FENNING'S ACADEMY FOR
YOUNG LADIES AT CLAPHAM, 1811

The Entrance Hall of Church House.

A Bell is ringing for a Recess as the Curtain ascends, and the YOUNG LADIES, in uniform, file out of the Class-rooms on either side of the Hall, standing about talking and laughing. HELLEN SHELLEY and HARRIET WESTBROOKE, two pretty School-girls of fourteen and sixteen respectively, seek each other out, and manage to whisper together in a corner.

HARRIET (*whispering*) : Hellen ! . . . Come here. . . . I've got something to show you.

HELLEN : What is it, Harriet ?—But be careful, don't let the old "Hawke" see !

HARRIET (*excitedly*) : She's still in the class-room.—It's another letter from Bysshe—I've had it in my bodice all during lessons !

HELLEN (*inquisitively*) : Oh, how exciting !—What does he say ?

HARRIET : A lot about religion and philosophy—which I don't understand—but he's coming to see us this afternoon, with my sister Eliza as chaperon.

HELLEN : That's a good thing, otherwise he mightn't be allowed in.—I'm afraid Miss Hawkes thinks it's improper to have a brother !

HARRIET (*romantically*) : Certainly one who has been expelled from Oxford, and lodges in Poland Street—like a bright-eyed fox, with nothing to eat but the grapes on the wall-paper ! . . .

HELLEN (*anxiously*) : Did you manage to give him my pocket money last week ?

HARRIET : Yes—but he said he would buy some more cakes for us, and smuggle them in as he did before !

HELLEN : I wish he would buy some food for himself.—I know he's hungry, because his pockets are always full of breadcrumbs and raisins, and it's the only thing he can afford ! . . .

HARRIET (*irritably*) : It's perfectly ridiculous when he's heir to a fortune.—Why won't your Father make him a proper allowance ?

HELLEN : Not unless he returns to Oxford, and apologises to the Master for his pernicious pamphlet.

HARRIET : Could you see Shelley apologising to anybody ? . . . I can't.—But won't your Mother help him ?

HELLEN : She sent him some money the other day, but he returned it, as he said he would then be accepting his Father's conditions.

HARRIET (*tremulously*) : He's as proud as Lucifer—and as dangerous.—Listen to these ideas of his on God and the Devil ! . . . They quite frighten me ! . . .

[*As they pore over the letter, Miss HAWKES, a stern disciplinarian, enters from a Glass-room on the Right and bears down upon them.*]

MISS HAWKES : Harriet Westbrooke ! . . . Hellen Shelley ! . . . What are you reading in that corner ? . . .

HARRIET (*quickly trying to conceal it*) : Only a letter, Miss Hawkes.

MISS HAWKES : Oh, indeed.—And who is it from, may I ask ? Let me see it.

HARRIET *(aside)* : Only from my brother, Miss Hawkes, and quite a proper letter, I assure you.

MISS HAWKES *(sings)* : That will be for me to judge—give it to me at once, Harriet.

[HARRIET hands it over in fear and trembling.]

MISS HAWKES *(reading letter)* : But this is monstrous! . . . I never read anything so sacrilegious in my life! . . . How long has this correspondence been going on for, Harriet?

HAWKES *(very angry)* : Ever since I met Mr. Shelley—when he left Oxford. —

MISS HAWKES : From where, I understand, he was expelled as an Atheist and Reprobate,——

HARRIET *(terrified)* : Atheist and Reprobate! . . . Oh, Miss Hawkes, whatever does that mean? . . .

MISS HAWKES : Everything diabolical!—which you should not understand. . . .

HARRIET : Oh, but Mr. Shelley says we should—that ignorance is wrong!

MISS HAWKES *(aside to herself)* : No wonder his Father warned me against this pernicious young man!—But I shall put a stop to it at once. —

Young ladies, *(turning to the girls who gather round her, coming out of the Class-room)*, I have discovered Harriet Westbrooke carrying on an illicit correspondence with the atheist brother of Hellen Shelley.—As a punishment, I forbid you to speak to her until she has become a respectable Christian again.—Do you understand?

CHORUS OF GIRLS : Yes, Miss Hawkes.

MISS HAWKES *(pointing to an Iron Collar hanging on the wall)* : Meanwhile, as a penance, she shall wear an iron collar round her neck.—Bring it to me here, Harriet, while I put it round your neck. *(HARRIET brings it from the Wall.)* Incidentally, it should cure your tendency to poke your head.

HARRIET : Yes, Miss Hawkes—I suppose it should. (*Meekly bending her head.*)

MISS HAWKES : Do you not wonder the earth does not swallow him up, or the lightning descend from Heaven to strike him dead? . . .

HARRIET (*dutifully*) : Yes, Miss Hawkes. . . .

MISS HAWKES (*severely*) : Take heed then that you call not down retribution on yourself. Come here—bend your head, while I put it on.

[HARRIET *does so as she puts it round her neck.*

MISS HAWKES (*turning to HELLEN*) : And as for you, Hellen, if I hear any more of the matter I shall inform your Father, Mr. Timothy Shelley—as well as Mr. Westbrooke—and you will both be expelled forthwith. (*A shudder runs through the GIRLS, as a School Bell rings again for tea.*) That is all, Young Ladies, you may go to tea—except Harriet and Hellen, who do not deserve any at all.—

CHORUS OF GIRLS : Yes, Miss Hawkes.

[*She sweeps out, followed by the GIRLS in procession, who cast scornful glances at HARRIET and HELLEN.*

1ST SCHOOLGIRL (*muttering as they pass*) : Abandoned wretch !

2ND SCHOOLGIRL (*whispering*) : She is probably an atheist herself !

1ST SCHOOLGIRL : Only she doesn't know the meaning of the word !

2ND SCHOOLGIRL : We can't have her as Venus at our fête now.

3RD SCHOOLGIRL : I always said her looks belied her.

4TH SCHOOLGIRL : How *could* she correspond with a maniac like Shelley !

3RD SCHOOLGIRL : I can't think what she sees in his flowing locks and ill-fitting old clothes !

4TH SCHOOLGIRL : I suppose she *thinks* they're poetical !—The little Fool ! . . .

[*They all troop out laughing, while HARRIET sobs in a corner, and HELLEN stays behind to comfort her.*

HELLEN (*tearfully*) : Oh, Harriet, you poor child . . . to think that Bysse should have brought all this infamy on you ! . . .

HARRIET : Sh ! . . . Go away—you must not speak to me, or they will all hate you too.

HELLEN (*bravely*) : What do I care ?—I despise them all ;—their friendship is not worth having at that price.—They are all a pack of cowards and hypocrites !

HARRIET : It hurts me to see their unkind looks—when an hour ago they were all smiles ! . . .

HELLEN (*proudly*) : I hold them in the greatest contempt—as Shelley would do if he were here. (*Looking through the window.*) Look !—I see him coming through the Gateway, up the Drive. . . .

HARRIET : Oh heavens ! Miss Hawkes will never allow him in if she sees him ! . . .

HELLEN : I will run out to warn him—Miss Hawkes is taking tea—— If he comes in through the Window she will never see him.

HARRIET : But what about me ? . . . She may send to fetch me in a moment ! . . .

HELLEN : I will tell her you are weeping your eyes out . . . she will never suspect you are entertaining the Atheist in the flesh !

[*She runs out through the French windows to fetch SHELLEY, while HARRIET pulls out a miniature mirror and comb from her bodice, tidies her hair, and wipes her eyes with a white pocket-handkerchief, while HELLEN and SHELLEY creep in surreptitiously through the Window.*

HELLEN (*calling in through the window*) : All clear ? . . .

HARRIET (*softly*) : Yes. . . . Come in quickly . . . there's no one looking.

[*HELLEN leads SHELLEY in, looking shabbier than before, worn and unhappy.*

HELLEN (*whispering*) : Come in, Bysshe—it's quite safe—the old Hawke's at tea. But I must run now or there'll be a hue and cry for me. . . .

[*She goes quickly towards the Door Centre Back.*]

SHELLEY (*aside to HARRIET*) : There are some hopes of that dear little girl—she would be a divine little scion of Liberty, if only I could get hold of her ! (*As she runs out to join the others, SHELLEY and HARRIET are left alone together.*)

SHELLEY : Harriet ! What on earth has happened ? . . . What is that monstrous thing round your neck ? . . .

HARRIET : The result of your letter, Bysshe ! . . .

SHELLEY (*astonished*) : What in Heaven's name do you mean ? . . .

HARRIET : Miss Hawkes discovered your last letter to me—has sent me to Coventry—and put me in the Stocks !

SHELLEY (*horrified*) : But this is outrageous ! . . . You can't be tortured on my account !—I won't allow it !

HARRIET : I'm afraid you can't prevent it, Bysshe. This is a prison-house, and I'm entirely at their mercy. . . .

SHELLEY (*heatedly*) : But it's an abominable system—you shouldn't tolerate it a moment !

HARRIET : What can I do ? . . . Besides, this is only the outward sign.—What is far more painful is the contempt and hatred in which I am now held. . . .

SHELLEY (*scathingly*) : Surely you aren't worldly enough to mind that ?—What is the opinion of a few snivelling little schoolgirls, in relation to your immortal soul ? . . .

HARRIET (*doubtfully*) : But is it immortal ? . . . All your metaphysical discussions make me doubt if I have a soul at all ! . . .

SHELLEY (*disappointedly*) : Harriet !—How can you be so ignorant after all my efforts to enlighten you ? . . .

HARRIET : Shelley, you terrify me—I wonder you can live a moment professing such principles.—But I declare you shall never change mine !

SHELLEY (*confidently*) : We shall see—when you listen to my arguments you will change in a trice.

HARRIET (*nervously*) : Then I will not listen—in case you shake my beliefs. I should probably see the Devil if I listened to you—I often dream of him, as it is. . . .

SHELLEY : That is the effect of a bad education and living with Methodists !

HARRIET (*pathetically*) : Oh, I am so utterly miserable and wretched ! . . . I am entirely useless, for I have no one to love—I am no good to myself or to others—what shall I do ? Would it be wrong to make an end of it ? . . . What do you advise, Bysshe ?

SHELLEY : If you are really utterly useless, Suicide is a solution——— But resist this persecution and tyranny at all costs. . . . I will write to your Father, and suggest that he should remove you from this prison-house at once.

HARRIET : He will never do that.—He has compelled me to return before now—although I have been extremely unwell—and he has persecuted me in the most horrible way———

SHELLEY : What an inexorable wretch he is !—But could not your sister Eliza persuade him ?

HARRIET : What use would it be ? . . . I am miserable at home—in my Father's Coffee-house—where he entertains all his middle-class friends.

SHELLEY : They were certainly a rowdy lot the other night, when I sat by your couch till after twelve, and refused to join them.

HARRIET : How ill I felt ! . . . But how you soothed and consoled me !

SHELLEY : Your sister, Eliza, was too civil by half—she began talking about “ L’amour ”——

HARRIET : Which gave me a headache !—I preferred just to lie, and close my eyes, and feel you near. . . .

SHELLEY : Your sister is clever, but very conceited—though somewhat condescending.—What does she do with herself all day ?

HARRIET : She spends most of her time brushing her hair—and reading Voltaire in between—to please you.

SHELLEY (*mystified*) : To please me ! . . . But why on earth should she want to please me ?

HARRIET : Because she says you are so good-looking—a poet—and the son of a Baronet—and a vastly superior person to all the people we are accustomed to associate with.

SHELLEY (*humbly*) : I am superior to no one—my birth was an accident—and no credit or fault of mine.—But a poet I am becoming—and a philosopher too, I hope—and *you* can become the same, if you will study and learn. . . .

HARRIET : Oh, Shelley, I long to—but how can I here ?—when I am not even allowed to correspond with you—and we are taught only how to become Genteel Young Ladies ! . . .

SHELLEY : It is monstrous that this fiend Intolerance should poison all the innocent joys of life ! . . .

HARRIET : But they say it is *you* who is poisoning our minds with your new-fangled doctrines !

SHELLEY : Oh ! They do, do they ? . . . Great heavens ! that they should be so blind ! . . . But it is criminal that anyone so quick and perceptive as *you* should be cooped up in this prison-house——

HARRIET : If only I could escape !—and breathe the pure air of freedom !—I know my whole mind and soul would open and expand in the sunlight. . . .

SHELLEY : I am convinced that it would—with proper tuition——

HARRIET : And *you* would be the perfect tutor. Bysshe?—if you could spare the time? . . .

SHELLEY : Is there no way we could arrange it? . . . Will not your Father listen to reason, and let you leave this awful place?——

HARRIET : Never—he is adamant—there is only one way, Bysshe——

SHELLEY (*innocently*) : What is that?

HARRIET (*boldly*) : By fleeing with *you*!—at once—to-day!——

SHELLEY (*amazed*) : With me? . . . But how? . . . And where? . . . I have no money—nothing—— What could we live on, my dear? . . .

HARRIET : You must have a few hundreds a year?—and for the rest, we could live on Love! . . .

SHELLEY : I have only two hundred a year—and that is subject to my Father's whims——

HARRIET (*shrewdly*) : But you are heir to a great estate and a large fortune—at least, so Eliza says—surely we could mortgage that?—and flee together? . . .

SHELLEY : But where? . . . Where could we go?—to escape your family—and mine?——

HARRIET (*romantically*) : To Scotland—where they are *free*, over the Border! . . . to Gretna Green!—or somewhere equally romantic——

SHELLEY : Harriet! . . . Are you suggesting that we should marry?——

HARRIET : Well? . . . Is there any reason why we should not? . . .

SHELLEY : Except that we are both under age——

HARRIET : But nobody will know!—if I put my hair up, and lengthen my skirt—we can contrive to look grown-up!

SHELLEY : You are right—I feel a hundred at least ! . . .

HARRIET : You don't look it—but you might pass for twenty-one, in the dark !——

SHELLEY : But my main objection is the Marriage Service itself—I cannot bear the thought of anyone I love submitting to the degradation of it——

HARRIET (*subtly*) : But if a woman loves a man she wants to honour and obey him——

SHELLEY : But not to become his slave—it is all too primitive and barbaric for words !——

HARRIET (*taking the plunge*) : Then we will dispense with it altogether, if you wish ?

SHELLEY (*in surprise*) : You mean you are willing to flee with me—without marriage ? . . .

HARRIET : If you love me, Bysshe ? . . . That is all that matters——

SHELLEY (*to himself*) : Love—Love—— What is Love ? . . . I often wonder—— But I fear my present feelings resemble wild action, rather than inspired passion. . . .

HARRIET : But you are a Knight Errant, Bysshe, and I am your Lady Love—to be rescued from these horrible persecutions ! . . .

SHELLEY : An Andromeda chained to the rock !—and I would be a sorry Perseus did I not hear your cry !—— What ? . . .

HARRIET (*ominously*) : Precisely—— And it might be the cry of Death—if you are not rapid, Shelley—I cannot endure this relentless tyranny much longer——

SHELLEY (*determinedly*) : Say no more, Harriet—I will make all arrangements at once—and we will catch the Mail Coach for Edinburgh from the “Bull and Mouth”, near your home, in Mount Street, to-morrow morning—if you can be ready ?——

HARRIET (*ecstasially*) : Shelley ! . . . Do you mean it ? . . . Of course, I can be ready ! . . . Eliza will help me—and I will go away from school to-night with her—saying I am ill and must have a few days' rest at home—

SHELLEY : But will they allow you ? . . .

HARRIET : Eliza will persuade them—otherwise I will slip away, in any case, and meet you at the " Bull and Mouth " to-morrow—at what time did you say ?

SHELLEY : Early—in time for breakfast—I am not certain at what hour the Coach leaves—but we will have Oysters for breakfast at the Inn—and celebrate our departure royally—

[HARRIET *hears steps approaching*.

HARRIET : Shh ! . . . I hear someone coming ! . . . Go quickly—you must not be caught here—or all will be spoilt—

[SHELLEY *goes to the Window rapidly*.

SHELLEY : Good-bye, Harriet—until to-morrow—when we begin Life anew together—

HARRIET (*calling after him, then shutting the window*) : Till to-morrow—at eight !—

[*The Side Door opens, and ELIZA WESTBROOKE comes in, a plain, middle-aged Spinster in spectacles, with a pale face and glossy dark hair.*

HARRIET (*excitedly*) : Eliza ! . . . Eliza ! . . . I knew you would come ! . . . You are just in time to hear the most wonderful news !

[*She rushes across to her.*

ELIZA : Harriet ! . . . my little Harriet ! . . . What has happened ?—You are flushed all over.—What in the world is the matter ? (*Taking her in her arms.*)

HARRIET (*kissing her hands and cheeks*) : I have the most miraculous news for you—give me your hands—give me your cheeks—let me kiss you all over—and dance with glee— (*Whirling her round and hugging her close.*)

ELIZA (*bewildered*) : But Harriet, my dear ! . . . Have you gone completely mad ? . . . What has come over you, my pet ? . . .

HARRIET (*ecstatically*) : Everything—everything—I have got my heart's desire—the Divine—the Impossible has happened—the fairytale has come true—all our dreams—and plans and schemes—have succeeded—beyond our wildest hope !

ELIZA : You don't mean ?—— You can't mean ?—— Oh, my dear ! . . . my dear ! . . .

HARRIET (*exultantly*) : But I do— I do.—Can you believe it !—Aren't I cleverer than you ever thought me ? . . . Your little Harriet, whom you have trained from the cradle up—in the way she should go—— !

ELIZA (*excitedly*) : You mean—he has come up to the mark—at last ?

HARRIET : Yes—yes—it is all arranged—everything !—I only need your help to put it into execution.

ELIZA (*impatiently*) : When ?—Where ?—What time do you meet ?——

HARRIET : At the “ Bull and Mouth ” to-morrow, at eight o'clock in the morning.—But you must help me to get away from here, Eliza.

ELIZA : Of course, my dearest child—I will do *anything*—at once—you know that.

HARRIET (*calculatingly*) : First, you must tell Miss Hawkes that I am looking so ill that you insist on taking me home at once—for a few days' rest——

ELIZA : That should not be difficult—with that hectic flush on your cheeks—— !

HARRIET : *Feverish*—don't forget.—Then you must pack my clothes surreptitiously at home, and allay Father's suspicions at breakfast to-morrow——

[*The Chapel Bell begins ringing.*]

ELIZA : Have no fear—I will arrange all.—But look ! Here come the Girls and Mistresses—try and look ill quickly, my dear.

[*The GIRLS walk through the Hall in Crocodile line, casting reviling looks at HARRIET, with Miss HAWKES at the end. ELIZA stops her boldly, HARRIET looking ill and timid.*

ELIZA : Pardon me, Miss Hawkes. . . .

MISS HAWKES (*stopping impatiently*) : What is it you want, Miss Westbrooke ? . . .

ELIZA : May I be allowed to take my sister Harriet home for a night or two ?—as she has a feverish flush—and may be sickening for an infection——?

MISS HAWKES (*severely*) : She has brought misery and misfortune on her own head by her disgraceful and misguided conduct !—and I am not surprised she is afflicted——

ELIZA : But you would not wish her school-fellows to suffer with her ?——

MISS HAWKES : Certainly not—I have already forbidden them to have any intercourse with her whatsoever—so it might be just as well to remove her for a night or two, so that she may think over her delinquencies in seclusion.

ELIZA : Precisely—that was exactly my own opinion——

HARRIET : Oh, thank you, Miss Hawkes, that is just what I hoped——

MISS HAWKES (*interrupting*) : Silence ! . . . I forbid you to speak to me in the presence of my uncontaminated pupils ! . . . Hellen Shelley, lead on to Chapel, and pray for your poor misguided School-fellow, as well as yourself.

[*The GIRLS march on to Chapel through the further door, as the Bell continues ringing, and they begin chanting a Psalm, as ELIZA and HARRIET slip away grinning at each other, as the Curtain descends.*

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

SCENE II

SHELLEY'S LODGINGS IN GEORGE
STREET, EDINBURGH, AUGUST,
1811

As the Curtain ascends, the LANDLORD, a bluff, good-humoured fellow, is showing SHELLEY and HARRIET into the handsome front-parlour, where they have just arrived, off the Mail Coach.

LANDLORD (*bluffly*) : This way, sir. This is our front-parlour, and a handsome one, you'll admit.—A bedroom in there, which would suit you and the young lady nicely.

SHELLEY (*prudishly*) : My wife, sir—as soon as we can arrange the service.

LANDLORD (*jovially*) : Beg pardon, I'm sure, sir, but we're used to couples crossing the border informal like !

HARRIET (*primly*) : We wish to be married as soon as possible—if we can afford it.

LANDLORD (*good-naturedly*) : Oh, if that's the only difficulty, Miss, I'm sure I could oblige.

(*Aside to SHELLEY, smiling meaningly*) : There is generally a worse reason than that !

SHELLEY (*priggishly, pretending not to understand*) : We are in a slight pecuniary trouble at the moment—but I anticipate a remittance very shortly.

LANDLORD : In that case, sir, allow me to assist you, and to supply your wants meanwhile ?

SHELLEY (*touched and surprised*) : That would be extraordinarily generous of you—and not typical of your race, if I may say so.—The truth is, we have fled from parental authority, who are trying to starve us into submission.

LANDLORD (*slyly*) : I fully appreciate the situation, sir, and I will afford you all relief—on one condition only ! . . .

SHELLEY (*innocently*) : And what may that be ?

LANDLORD : That you treat my friends and myself to a nuptial supper to celebrate the event !

SHELLEY : With the greatest of pleasure in the world—so long as you don't insist on us joining you ?

LANDLORD (*jovially*) : As you please, sir. No doubt you and the young lady will be too occupied elsewhere—but we never like to miss an opportunity to celebrate in this sombre city !

SHELLEY : So it appears.—And now if you will send your Domestic to us we should be grateful for a little sustenance after our journey.

LANDLORD (*ringing bell*) : No doubt, sir. Christie will be with you in an instant.—She is somewhat of an imbecile, but can fetch and carry incessantly.

HARRIETT : Can she brew tea ?—that is the first essential.

LANDLORD : Most certainly, Miss—er—Madam,—and as black as you like.

[CHRISTIE, a dirty little slut, appears in the doorway.

Here, Christie, come and attend on this young lady and gentleman, while I go below-stairs to order the wedding supper. At your service, Madam,—Sir. (*He goes out bowing.*)

SHELLEY (*aside to HARRIETT*) : What a dirty little nymph this is.—Well, Christie—and what have you got for dinner ?

CHRISTIE (*incoherently*) : "Sengit heed and bonnocks."

SHELLEY (*dazed*) : What? . . .

HARRIET (*impatiently*) : Never mind her, Bysshe. She's only speaking a foreign language.—What else have you got for dinner, girl?

CHRISTIE (*stupidly*) : "Sengit heed and bonnocks."

SHELLEY (*hysterically*) : Oh! send her away, Harriet, for God's sake send her away! . . .

HARRIET (*irritably*) : How can you be so absurd, Bysshe?—What harm does the poor girl do you?

SHELLEY (*rushing into a corner, and covering his ears with his hands*) : Send her away at once, Harriet. I can't bear the voice or the face of the Caledonian maiden! I shall leap out of the window . . . if I hear any more of her! . . .

HARRIET : I trust she doesn't understand our dialect any more than we do hers!—Will you please bring us some tea, and a *kettle* of hot water, Christie?

CHRISTIE (*grinning*) : Oh! . . . the Kittle! . . . Oh yes! . . .

[CHRISTIE darts out of the door, banging it loudly behind her.

SHELLEY (*laughing, imitating her*) : "Oh! the Kittle!" I believe that's the first word she understood! . . .

HARRIET : (*hearing sound of banging doors*) : Fortunately for her!—How the doors bang in this house—like thunder!—Horrible! . . .

SHELLEY (*tenderly*) : You're not frightened, Harriet, at the step we've taken? . . . Are you?

HARRIET (*gratefully*) : Of course not, Bysshe—only thankful to have escaped from that prison-house of a school,—and my intolerable family. . . .

SHELLEY : Have they any idea of our destination ?

HARRIET : I left a note for my Father with Eliza.

SHELLEY (*nervously*) : Wasn't that indiscreet ?
—They may pursue us ? . . .

HARRIET : Only Eliza—Father would never leave his coffee-house—and Eliza would look after us both !

SHELLEY (*petulantly*) : But I don't want to be looked after.—I thought you had thrown yourself on *my* protection—to escape from them all ? . . .

HARRIET (*sensibly*) : So I have—but we must have some pecuniary assistance soon.—We can't live on love, you know. . . .

SHELLEY : We have done very well the last three days, haven't we ?—and I left a note for Hogg, as we passed through York, asking him to advance us ten pounds.

HARRIET (*anxiously*) : Do you think he will do so ?

SHELLEY : As certain as I am alive.—Moreover, my quarterly allowance is due on the first of September—fifty pounds ! What riches !—Just think of it !

HARRIET (*nervously*) : But your Father may stop it when he hears of our elopement ?

SHELLEY (*cheerfully*) : Then we shall have to write Uncle Pilfold—or Uncle Medwin—or both ! Never fear, sweet Harriet, I am your protector, what need is there to be afraid ? . . .

[*Loud knocking on the outside door again.*]

HARRIET (*frightenedly*) : Whoever can that be at this hour ?

SHELLEY (*trembling*) : I trust our families have not pursued us ! . . . But I had better open it and learn the worst, I suppose (*hesitating*).

HARRIET (*bravely*) : Yes—go and open it at once, and see—— Don't be such a coward, Bysshe !——

[He opens the door a crack, to find HOGG on the threshold.]

SHELLEY (*embracing him rapturously*) : Hogg !—My dear fellow !—How rapturous to see you ! After all these months ! . . . and at this hour ! . . . How have you come ? . . . Have you dropped from Heaven itself ? . . .

HOGG (*coming in*) : Only from York. I got your note as you passed through, and caught the next stage-coach that passed, hoping to overtake you on the way.

SHELLEY (*clapping him on the shoulder*) : How joyous to see you again ! . . . You are looking just the same as you did at Oxford——

HOGG (*taking his arm*) : And you as bright-eyed as a Fox,—as you did in our trellised apartment in Poland Street,—last April !

SHELLEY : At last we have met, in spite of our families attempting to separate us—— !

HOGG (*turning to HARRIET*) : But have *I* met this fair and beautiful Lady—— ?

SHELLEY (*taking HARRIET's hand and presenting her to HOGG*) : Ah, Harriet—this is my fine and noble friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg, of whom you have heard me speak,—and ecstasise so much.

HARRIET (*smilingly*) : Indeed, I have, Mr. Hogg.—But for once Shelley's enthusiasm has not run away with him.——

HOGG (*kissing her hand impulsively*) : Nor has it of his lovely young bride—bright as the morning—but not so bright as this day on which we meet.

HARRIET (*cooly*) : Fic !—Mr. Hogg !—No wonder you are a poet, and were expelled from Oxford for your extravagances ! . . .

SHELLEY : But now that we have all met once more, we will never part again.—You must have a bed in the house at once, Hogg.

[He starts pulling the Bell-rope violently.]

HOGG (*casually*) : A bed a mile or two off will do me.

SHELLEY : Nonsense, we will summon the landlord immediately. Landlord ! Ho ! Landlord ! (*Calling out through the Door.*)

LANDLORD (*through Doorway*) : At your service, sir, in an instant.

SHELLEY : A bed in your house for this gentleman, please.

LANDLORD (*appearing in Doorway*) : Ah, sir. I'm afraid——

SHELLEY : But it is most necessary—urgent——

HARRIET : Essential—indispensable,—I assure you——

LANDLORD (*scratching his head*) : Very well then.—I have a spare bedroom, but it is at the very top of the house.—It may not be so pleasant.

SHELLEY : What matter, so long as you are under the same roof as us?—now and forever !

HOGG : That will do very well—but is there a feather-bed ?

LANDLORD (*holding up his hands in horror*) : Oh, I would not put a guest to sleep in a feather-bed !—You have a nice, wholesome straw mattress.

HOGG : But I should prefer to lie on something softer.

LANDLORD (*firmly*) : Oh, but you cannot.—You *must* lie on a straw mattress—health enjoins it, sir.

HOGG (*slapping the table*) : But is it not as hard as this table ?

LANDLORD : Very like—and so it ought to be—you cannot lie too hard, sir.—You might lie very well on this table ;—it would be highly salubrious.

HOGG (*shrugging his shoulders*) : I prefer to think otherwise,—but obviously there is no redress.

SHELLEY : You have come here to learn, not to teach, my dear Hogg !

HOGG (*laughing*) : Obviously, my dear fellow.

LANDLORD : Meanwhile, sir, allow me to conduct you upstairs. The way is not difficult, but somewhat long.

[*He opens Door, showing an inner Staircase, up to the Attics.*

HOGG (*looking up at it*) : Up there !—It appears well-nigh interminable !

SHELLEY (*going towards it*) : You will be lodging with Jupiter on the top of Olympus !—but I will accompany you there.—We will return shortly, Harriett, my dear, if you will brew some tea for two starving poets.

[SHELLEY, HOGG, and the LANDLORD go out up the stairs.

HARRIET : Very well, Bysshe, I will ring for Christie, again.

[*She does so, then takes off her bonnet and coat, and tidies herself, as CHRISTIE brings in Tea, with shortbread and honey.*

HARRIET : Oh, what delicacies !—What do you call this crisp, hard cake, Christie ?

CHRISTIE : Shortbread, Miss . . . er . . . Madam.

HARRIET : Indeed !—What dainties you make in this barbarous country !—And what lovely virgin honey !—Bysshe—Mr. Hogg—tea is ready, so come as quickly as you can.

[*Helping CHRISTIE to set it out on the table.*

SHELLEY (*re-entering with HOGG*) : We are coming, my dear.—What an exquisite tea to find among these rude, uncivilised barbarians ! . . . (*Looking at the delicacies.*)

HOGG : What exquisite honey indeed, but it seems a shame to eat it !—It is fit for Parnassus, not for us Mortals !

SHELLEY : On the contrary, I find it most satisfactory, and relish it surprisingly.

[*Seizing a Honey-comb as he sits, and eating it greedily.*

HOGG (*superiorly*) : But wantonly to destroy so beautiful a structure, merely to flatter the palate, is as barbarous as it would be to devour roses or lilies !

HARRIET : I quite agree, Mr. Hogg.—It is far too great a marvel to be eaten.—It should only be looked at and admired.——

HOGG (*flatteringly*) : Like yourself, fair lady. . . . It approaches cannibalism to feed on it ! —Indeed, it is too like eating Harriet !—But I believe you would eat Harriet herself, Bysshe, if she were honey ? . . .

SHELLEY (*teasingly*) : So I would, if she were as good to eat,—and I could replace her as easily !

HARRIET : Oh fie, Bysshe !—but I incline to Mr. Hogg's heresy, and declare it is quite a pity to eat it !

SHELLEY (*shrugging, with his mouth full*) : 'Tiresome of you,—but *you* are the losers !—not me !

HARRIET : Be introduced to *this* delicacy instead, Mr. Hogg—Shortbread, which I have never seen in London.

[*Handing him some coquettishly.*]

HOGG : By Jove, yes, and it appears to be a very nice thing—(*he eats some*)—and very palatable to a young stomach ! (*Patting his own.*)

HARRIET : We must go for a walk tomorrow, and see the palace of the unfortunate Queen Mary, of Scotland.

SHELLEY : A beggarly place, in truth, I believe.

HARRIET : Nevertheless, I should like to see the stains of Rizzio's blood, and all the other horrid relics ! . . .

SHELLEY : What a blood-thirsty Child you are, after all !

HOGG : But I understand you must walk discreetly in Edinburgh.—You must not laugh openly—and fiendishly, as *you* do, Bysshe,—or you will be convened !

SHELLEY : Convened ? . . . What is that ? . . .

HOGG : Why, if you laugh aloud in the public streets and ways, on the Christian sabbath, you will be cast into prison, and eventually banished from Scotland !

SHELLEY : Then I should prefer to return to an un-Christian country like England !

HOGG : Oh, but we must go and hear a certain Dr. Macquisquis, an accomplished divine. I hear he wrestles with Satan most powerfully every Sabbath morn !

HARRIET : Well, *I* shall not accompany you.—I will prefer to stay at home, and study, and read aloud.

SHELLEY (*munching hungrily*) : Harriet is a most inveterate reader—she likes a solid tome, where a hungry reader can cut and come again !

HOGG (*ironically*) : Then our stay here will indeed be edified——

SHELLEY (*ecstatically*) : It will be Oxford over again. We will stay here forever, reading, writing, studying——

HOGG (*cynically*) : Until funds run out, presumably—although I have come armed with a modest pittance.

[*Sounds of roystering from below.*]

SHELLEY : The Landlord has given us unlimited credit—until my remittance arrives—on condition that he celebrates our Wedding tonight.

HARRIET : From the roystering below I should think they have begun ! . . .

HOGG : Which reminds me—where is my hat ? . . .

SHELLEY : The Landlord took it to hang up in the hall.

HOGG : I will see if it is still there.——

[*He goes out, to return in a moment without it, as the noises draw nearer.*]

I knew it ! . . . It has gone !——

HARRIET (*mystified*) : But who could have taken it ?

SHELLEY : The Landlord informed me there are only ourselves and the people who occupy the first floor, and they are " high " people—very " high " indeed !

HOGG : However " high " they may be it seems the grandees of Scotland are not above taking a hat !—And a hat is a hat, costing thirty-five shillings at least !

SHELLEY : You should never have left it in the passage.

HOGG : The Landlord assured me it would be perfectly safe there—at least as safe as anywhere else in Scotland !

SHELLEY : You should have been more cautious in a country where nothing is too hot or too heavy—not even a top-hat ;—Where every man takes what he can get, from the Senator of Justice down to the most profound and beggarly metaphysician !

[Loud voices and footsteps approaching, and heavy knockings on the door.]

HOGG : Perhaps this is my hat, seeking admittance !

SHELLEY : Let us hope so.—Who's there ? . . . Come in.—

[The Door bursts open, with the LANDLORD and some of his Friends standing in the Doorway, with Bottles and Mugs in each hand.]

LANDLORD (*flushed with wine*) : Beg pardon, sir, but we are celebrating your nuptials below-stairs.

SHELLEY : So it would appear,—and to some purpose, no doubt !

LANDLORD (*swayingly*) : We came to inquire if we might revive an old Scottish custom on this auspicious occasion ? . . .

SHELLEY : Indeed,—and what may that be ?

LANDLORD (*drunkenly, while the others grin behind him*) : It is customary here at weddings for the guests to come in, in the middle of the night, and wash the bride with whiskey !

SHELLEY (*horrified*) : What ! . . . I have never heard of such impertinence in my life ! . . . What an outrageous suggestion ! . . .

HOGG (*amused*) : Now we are going to have some humour !

HARRIET (*terrified, cowering behind SHELLEY*) : Oh, Bysshe, save me from these ruffians !

SHELLEY (*pushing HARRIETT towards HOGG*) : Hogg, look after her while I deal with these Barbarians ! . . .

[*He catches up a brace of pistols which he had previously taken out of his pockets, pointing them at the astonished LANDLORD.*]

HOGG *puts his arm round HARRIET protectingly.*

SHELLEY (*furiously*) : I have had enough of your impertinence. If you give me any more of it, I will blow your brains out !

HOGG (*encouraging him*) : That's right, Bysshe, you go for him !

LANDLORD (*reeling backwards*) : As you please, sir, but I thought the young lady would think it an honour !

SHELLEY (*advancing menacingly, with a pistol in each hand*) : Get out, you swine, before I kill you ! . . .

[*The LANDLORD turns and runs, falling downstairs, with his Followers tumbling pell-mell behind him.*]

HOGG (*triumphantly*) : Behold my hat on the head of the last survivor ! . . .

[*HOGG rushes after them to seize his Hat, while HARRIET runs into SHELLEY'S arms as the Curtain Descends.*]

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

SCENE III

SHELLEY'S LODGINGS IN YORK,
SEPTEMBER, 1811

The Curtain rises on the dingy lodgings at 20 Concy Street of the Misses Dancer, two elderly Dress-makers. The whole room is dismal and poverty-stricken. The two old Crones are discovered sewing. It is late afternoon. HOGG and HARRIET burst in from a walk, brimming with life and health.

HOGG (*in Doorway enthusiastically*): What a delightful walk, Harriet my dear!—in spite of this “unpoetic and uninspiring city” of York, as Shelley calls it.

HARRIET (*irritably*): A most Immodest city, from the way its citizens stared at me! . . . I had to blush and draw my veil!—

HOGG (*flatteringly*): You should not be so engaging, my dear. (*Coming in.*) Ah, (*satirically*) the Misses Dancer!—looking like the Valkyries or the Fatal Sisters!—Are you sewing Shrouds, Young Ladies, or hemming Winding sheets in that dark corner—may I ask?—

1ST MISS DANCER (*rising injuredly*): We are not, sir! We are about to depart.—

HOGG (*mockingly*): Oh, don't let me banish you, pray.—But there is one question I should like to ask you.—You are dressmakers, are you not?—

THE MISSES DANCER (*haughtily*): We are.

HOGG (*cynically*) : But where, dear Ladies, are the Dresses which you make?—

THE MISSES DANGER (*surprised*) : Dresses? . . . We have no dresses! . . .

HOGG (*sarcastically*) : I thought as much!—Then I suppose you make Dresses for the Invisible Lady? . . . Invisible Dresses! . . .

THE MISSES DANGER (*uncomprehendingly*) : I am afraid we do not understand you, sir!

HOGG (*humorously*) : No, I was afraid you might not!—In any case, I have often wondered by whom such secret Mantles were worn?—Whether by Sister Spectres in Churchyards—or by grim Hags at Witches' Sabbaths! . . .

THE MISSES DANGER (*resentfully*) : You speak in Parables, sir.—We will bid you good afternoon—and fetch your tea—for you and the Young Lady.

[*They go out with dignity and disapproving glances.*]

HARRIET (*kindly*) : Poor old Crones! . . . I am afraid you've hurt their feelings.—

HOGG (*slippantly*) : Nonsense, they haven't any!—I am surprised they can get us tea.—I thought they were above doing anything useful—or anything at all for that matter!—

HARRIET (*shocked*) : How wicked you are, mocking at everything, Mr. Hogg!

HOGG (*lightly*) : Well, Life is a Jest, although *they* would like to demonstrate that it is something exquisitely serious and tiresome! . . .

HARRIET (*thoughtfully*) : I wonder what Bysshe would say if he were here?—

HOGG (*inquisitively*) : When does he return from trying to raise funds from that mistaken man, his Father?—

HARRIET (*rapturously*) : At any hour now—accompanied by my dear sister Eliza, I trust.

HOGG (*mockingly*) : You speak in the style of an inspired Prophetess of a glorious Advent! . . . Announcing the impending commencement of

a new Millennium of Happiness !—of the instant return of the Golden Age !—Of the coming of Eliza ! . . . with Bysshe !—

HARRIET (*loyally*) : Well, is it not so ?—I bear my Sister great love, and have entire faith in her.—I worship her—and yield her implicit obedience.—She has tended, guided, and ruled me, from my earliest infancy.

HOGG (*cynically*) : And doubtless married you, to suit herself ?—But what of your Mother ?—Have you no veneration for her ?—

HARRIET (*contemptuously*) : Mamma is as dignified as silk and satin can make her,—and capable of sitting all day with her hands before her,—but incapable of aught else besides,—except hearing herself addressed as “ Mamma ! ”

HOGG (*enquiringly*) : And your Father ?—What of him ?

HARRIET (*half-ashamed*) : He is called “ Jew Westbrooke ”—from his careful habits—as well as his Biblical appearance.—

HOGG (*humorously*) : No wonder he has tied his purse-strings tight, and buttoned up his trouser pockets, since your elopement !

HARRIET (*defending him*) : He was bound in decency to pretend to be angry—

HOGG (*sarcastically*) : In a somewhat thrifty fashion—I warrant !

HARRIET (*devotedly*) : My beloved Sister Eliza is the only one who has supported me through-out—

HOGG (*satirically*) : And is now about to come on Board again, after a short absence on Shore, to hoist her Flag at the Mast-head, to take the entire Command, and forever to direct the whole course of your Married life ! . . . Harriet !—How can you allow such a thing ? . . .

HARRIET (*stubbornly*) : I have complete faith in everything she decides—

HOGG (*curiously*) : Tell me, what is this Harbinger of all Felicity like?—

HARRIET (*ecstatically*) : She is beautiful—exquisitely beautiful—an elegant Figure, full of grace. Her Face is lovely,—dark bright eyes—jet black hair, very glossy—a crop upon which she bestows the care it merits—almost all her time.—And above all, she is so sensible, so amiable, so good ! . . .

HOGG (*morosely*) : I can see *I* shall be less than nothing !—a Negative quantity of a very high figure, as soon as she arrives !

HARRIET (*affectionately*) : You will *always* be my very dear friend—for Bysshe's sake—who has left me under your protection—and you know that.

HOGG (*hurt*) : No more than that ? . . .

HARRIET (*surprised*) : What more could you be, pray ?

[*A Knock is heard on the Door, and The Misses Dancer enter again. One bearing a tea-tray, and the Other leading a Lady in Travelling Dress.*]

Come in.

MISS DANCER (*showing ELIZA in*) : This is Mrs. Shelley's lodging, Miss, with Mr. Hogg,—but Mr. Shelley is away on business—

[*They leave the Tea, and retire.*]

ELIZA (*sniffily*) : So I observe, thank you. (*Turning to HARRIET.*) Harriet ! . . . my dearest child !

HARRIET (*flying to her arms in delighted surprise*) : My beloved Eliza ! . . . What Rapture to see you so unexpectedly ! . . . How have you managed to come so rapidly ?—My dearest Sister ! . . .

ELIZA (*severely*) : When you informed me that Bysshe had departed to Cuckfield, and you were left in Mr. Hogg's charge, I considered it was time to come north, and take charge of you myself.

HOGG (*stepping forward brightly*) : I am sure it is most noble of you, dear Lady,—Harriet, will you present me to your good Genius—your Guardian Angel? Miss Eliza Westbrooke—

HARRIET (*introducing them, delightedly*) : My Sister—Mr. Thomas Jefferson Hogg.

[ELIZA *scarcely deigns to notice him, nodding distantly, without giving her hand.*

Is it not good of Eliza to have come immediately? . . . So kind and thoughtful of her—

HOGG (*pointedly*) : Yes, indeed !—But I thought Bysshe was to have brought you with him, Miss Westbrooke?—

ELIZA (*airily*) : Oh dear no !—Bysshe has no idea of time.—I could not wait for expediences of that kind.—

HOGG (*mockingly*) : Shall I make tea?—As you, Miss Westbrooke, are obviously of too Sublime a Nature to endure a tea-pot—and Harriet is too overcome by your august presence to attend, as usual, to the vulgar requisitions of the tea-table.

ELIZA (*coldly*) : By all means.

[*She looks contemptuously at the cup HOGG places in front of her.*

HOGG (*acidly*) : Possibly you will descend, Harriet, from the seventh heaven, so far as to stir,—and even to sip your tea?—

[ELIZA and HARRIET *whisper intimately together.*]

While I help myself freely, like a good Philistine—as “the Music of the Spheres holds its thrilling course”.—Have some cake, Harriet?—I can highly recommend it. (*Eating heartily.*)

HARRIET (*politely*) : Thank you, Mr. Hogg. (*she takes some.*)

ELIZA (*horrified*) : But dearest Harriet, you are not going to eat that, surely ! . . . Only consider, my dear, the state of your Nerves !—

HOGG (*taken aback*) : Nerves ? . . . I never knew Harriett had such organs ?

ELIZA (*turning on him then on HARRIET*) : How could she be married to a Poet and not have Nerves ? . . . You are not going to drink another cup of Tea, surely, Harriet ? . . . Gracious Heaven !—What would “ Miss Warne ” say ? . . .

HOGG (*sarcastically*) : And who, may I ask, is “ Miss Warne ” ?

HARRIET (*whispering*) : The Daughter of a Coffee-house Keeper,—like Father,—and a Bosom Friend of Eliza’s.

HOGG (*aside to HARRIET*) : In fact a mature Virgin !—quite ripe—perhaps rather too mellow ? . . . A prim Old Maid—indeed an old Frump, what ? . . . I know the sort !

ELIZA (*rising furiously*) : If you wish to insult my Friends, sir—of whom I have the highest opinion—I shall leave the room—

HOGG (*blandly, Rising also*) : By all means, Miss Westbrooke.—In any case Harriet and I wished to continue our Studies, of which we always partake at this Hour.

ELIZA (*inquisitively*) : Studies !—What Studies ?

HARRIET (*explainingly*) : I continually read aloud to Mr. Hogg, to improve both our minds—

HOGG (*mischievously*) : And to keep us out of mischief !—

ELIZA (*dictatingly*) : Reading is most injurious—to the eyes and health.—And to read aloud might terminate fatally !—A most exhausting occupation !—

HOGG (*suavely*) : Indeed ;—Then perhaps you would prefer me to escort Harriet abroad again, for a little airing ?—

ELIZA (*severely*) : On the contrary, Harriet should stay at Home and rest,—and cultivate a

little repose—considering the state of her poor Nerves !

HOGG (*sarcastically*) : But apparently to stay at Home and read is Death, and to go Abroad is the Grave ! . . . So pray, Miss Westbrooke, what is Harriet allowed to do ?—Now that the whole house lies under an interdict ?——

ELIZA (*primly, going towards Doorway*) : She can comport herself in a Sisterly and Obedient manner, until Bysshe's return.—Meanwhile, I will retire for an hour or so, unpack, and revolve in my mind your best interests, my dearest Harriet.——

HARRIET (*rising and opening Door*) : This is your room, Eliza dear, and I trust you will find everything to your satisfaction.

ELIZA (*brusquely*) : If I do not, I will call for you immediately, my dear.

[*She goes into the Bedroom, shutting the Door behind her.*]

HOGG (*sighing with relief*) : Thank Heavens, for a brief interlude !——

HARRIET (*awefully*) : Eliza spends her time chiefly in her Bedroom. ——

HOGG (*curiously*) : That is one mercy ! What does she do all alone there ?—Does she read ? ——

HARRIET (*shaking her head*) : No. . . .

HOGG (*enquiringly*) : Does she work ?——

HARRIET (*firmly*) : Never. . . .

HOGG (*inquisitively*) : Does she write ?——

HARRIET : No. . . .

HOGG (*mystified*) : What does she do, then ?——

HARRIET (*coming closer and whispering seriously*) : She brushes her hair ! . . . For sixteen hours a day sometimes ! . . .

HOGG (*amazed*) : Good God ! . . . Her coarse black hair is glossy, no doubt.—But to devote sixteen hours out of the twenty-four is surely unnecessary !

HARRIET (*primly*) : Then she reflects on what "Miss Warne" would say !—(*Whispering, taking up a Book and Reading aloud.*) Come quite close to me, and I will read to you. . . . I must not speak loud, lest I should disturb poor Eliza.

HOGG (*wearily*) : But is it necessary to read all this "Telemachus", Harriet ?

HARRIET (*determinedly*) : Yes !—Absolutely.

HOGG (*yawning*) : Cannot you skip some part ?

HARRIET (*firmly*) : No, it's impossible !—

HOGG (*maliciously*) : Come for a walk, then, to that old Roman bridge across the Ouse, and let us imagine how nicely dearest Eliza would spin down the river !—How sweetly she would turn round and round like a log of wood ! "And gracious Heaven (*mimicing ELIZA*), what would 'Miss Warne' say !"

[HARRIETT turns away to laugh.

(*Seriously.*) You laugh.—But as a slave laughs—who is beginning to grow weary of an intolerable yoke ! . . .

HARRIET (*suddenly serious herself*) : Tell me, Hogg, what is your opinion of suicide ?—Did you never think of destroying yourself ? . . .

HOGG (*taken aback*) : What a puzzling question !—for the thought has never entered my head ! . . .

HARRIET (*strangely*) : What do you think of Matricide ?—Of High Treason ?—Of Rick-Burning ?—

HOGG (*surprised*) : I am afraid I have never contemplated them !—except in History !—

HARRIET (*wildly*) : Did you never think of killing anyone ? . . . Of murdering your Mother ?—Of setting Stack-yards on fire ? . . .

HOGG (*mock-seriously*) : I regret to say I have never considered committing any of these crimes !—

HARRIET (*admittingly*) : I have frequently—both at Clapham and here.—

HOGG (*anxiously*) : But, Harriet, are you not happy?—For in that case would you not allow me to minister to your happiness?—

HARRIET (*uncomprehendingly*) : I fear I do not understand your meaning, Mr. Hogg. . . .

HOGG (*earnestly*) : But it is only too obvious, too palpable—surely?—Since I first saw you in Edinburgh—bright, blooming, radiant with youth, health, and beauty—bright as the day on which we first met.—Surely you have sensed the nature of my feelings? . . . Harriet? . . .

HARRIET (*taken aback*) : On the contrary, I had no idea of such a thing! . . .

HOGG (*reminiscently*) : Do you not recollect when we climbed up to Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh, and the view was so exquisite, you said you would remain there forever? . . . How I contained myself from speaking my mind then I know not! . . . Or later, when I, being hungry, proceeded down the hill, and you ran after me, showing your Ankles, in a most rude and indelicate Wind? . . .

HARRIET (*primly*) : I recollect perfectly.—Which is why I refused to move till the Wind had abated!—

HOGG (*flatteringly*) : But if I was not to admire those carefully concealed Ankles, there was certainly no cause for me to blame them? . . .

HARRIET (*flustered*) : My dear friend, I must forbid you ever to intrude on my peace like this again! . . .

HOGG (*delighted*) : Ah, then I do upset you? You are not altogether insensible to my words? . . .

HARRIET (*shocked*) : Not insensible—but shocked and horrified!—Bysshe has placed me with entire trust in your care—and now you yield to ignoble Passion, and betray the Trust reposed in you!

HOGG (*passionately*) : Harriet!—How can you

be so cruel?—After all the hours we have been together.—I beg of you, I implore you, to permit my Love? . . . There is no injury to him who knows it not.—Why is it wrong to permit my love, if it does not alienate any affection? . . .

HARRIET (*prudishly*): Never mention the odious subject to me again!—I should have thought your high sense of Right and Virtue would have shown you the error of your Conduct! . . .

HOGG (*humbly*): You are right—I admit it.—And the only expiation in my power is to inform Bysshe by Letter of the whole.—

HARRIET (*wavering*): No—I forbid that—I should be fearful of the effect on his Mind at this distance. . . .

[*Sounds of Someone arriving without.* HOGG goes to the window to look out, and sees SHELLEY arriving.

HOGG (*amazed*): Shelley! . . . By God! . . .

HARRIET (*distractedly*): Oh, Heavens! . . . What shall we do? . . .

HOGG (*soothingly*): You need have no fear, but here is Bysshe himself, by Coach, sooner than we expected.

HARRIET (*decidedly*): I shall say nothing, for fear of upsetting him after his journey.—But my behaviour to you will be greatly altered—I shall never be able to regard you without pain and prejudice again. . . .

[SHELLEY bursts in, straight from the Stage-Coach, in his shabby Great-coat.

SHELLEY (*greeting them rapturously*): Harriet! . . . Hogg! . . . How ecstatic to see you both again! . . . My little Harriet!—How I have missed your lovely face amongst all the sour ones at Field Place! . . . (*Taking her in his arms.*)

HARRIET (*looking embarrassed*) : Shelley ! . . .
You are a Day before your time ! . . .

HOGG (*awkwardly*) : We were not expecting
you as yet—Bysshe——

SHELLEY (*taking off his Coat dejectedly*) : There
was nothing to detain me further—nothing was
to be obtained from that mistaken man, my
father.—And worse still—my Mother—who
hitherto had befriended me—has turned
Traitor. . . .

HARRIET (*sympathetically*) : Oh, poor Bysshe !
—all this incessant travelling for nothing !

SHELLEY (*putting an arm round each of them*) : You
and Hogg are the only two Beings on whom I
can rely in the World——

[HOGG and HARRIET exchange meaning glances
dropping their eyes shamefacedly.]

But why do you both look so oddly at each
other ? . . . Harriet, what has occurred ? . . .
Why has your behaviour to my Friend so
greatly altered ? . . . What are these looks of
prejudice and aversion between you ? . . .

HARRIET (*meaningly*) : Possibly Mr. Hogg's
unworthiness is the cause——

SHELLEY (*mystified*) : What do you mean by
that ? . . . My dear friend, will you kindly
interpret Harriet's dark hints for me ? . . .

HARRIET (*anxiously*) : No, no, Mr. Hogg, say
not a word.—It will only cause untold misery
and unhappiness.——

SHELLEY (*insistently*) : I insist—I *must* know—T'll
me what has occurred ?——

HOGG (*desperately*) : He had better have the
truth, Harriet—Nothing else will satisfy him—
Shelley—I have loved Harriet ever since I first
saw her with you in Edinburgh——

SHELLEY (*amazed*) : Loved Harriet ? . . .
Loved my wife ! . . . What do you mean ?

HOGG (*passionately*) : Passionately, ardently.—
And this passion has grown each day within

me, from motives which did not appear to me wrong. . . .

SHELLEY (*horrified*) : You are a mistaken man, Hogg. . . . vilely, dreadfully mistaken——!

HOGG (*remorsefully*) : I know. I know—I see it all now—I am terror-struck with remorse—And now I see the heinousness of my crime.——

SHELLEY (*witheringly*) : And so you should—*You*, who were the Champion of Virtue, have become the Slave of the most contemptible of prejudices ! . . . Oh, it is terrible, this stroke has almost withered my being ! . . .

HOGG (*excusing himself*) : The trouble is I have too great a susceptibility to Beauty——

SHELLEY (*indignantly*) : Too great a susceptibility of feeling !—You mean—without the power of Reason to control it !

HOGG (*wretchedly*) : I fear I have lost your good opinion for ever——

SHELLEY (*amazedly*) : Good opinion is a comprehensive term ! . . . But how could you have chosen the very time for this attempt when I most confided in you, and least doubted you ?——

HOGG (*excusing himself*) : You put temptation in my way by leaving Harriet in my protection.——

SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : Unwittingly, I assure you.—You know how I loved you—how I had implicit faith in you—how I considered you little below perfection. . . .

HOGG (*desperately*) : I *will* have your forgiveness, or blow my brains out at Harriet's feet.——

SHELLEY (*magnanimously*) : My Forgiveness I give you, fully, freely.—It is your crime, not you, which is the object of my detestation. . . .

HOGG (*beseechingly*) : Will you give me your love and friendship again ?——

SHELLEY (*cynically*) : What is Love or Friendship ? . . . a Ball—an Apple—a Plaything ! But

you know how I have loved you—I was even ashamed to tell you how much——

HOGG (*painfully*) : May we never enjoy Intimacy on the same happy terms as before ?——

SHELLEY (*firmly*) : That can never be—I positively forbid the thought of it.—You cannot live with us again—for I should thereby barter Harriet's happiness—and your reputation.

HOGG (*wildly*) : But I cannot exist without you and Harriet !—You are part of my life, essential, indispensable——

SHELLEY (*harshly*) : You have brought your own retribution on yourself—I could have died with you once—but now I am not prepared to live with you.—I am endeavouring to judge with disinterestedness :—But I owe it to Harriet's Happiness and your Reformation.—Do you not agree, Harriet ?——

HARRIET (*quickly*) : Perfectly.—It would be impossible to remain under the same roof after this. . . .

SHELLEY (*decisively*) : We will remove at once to the Lakes—to Keswick—there to forget this affair, and erase from our memory that it had ever been.

HOGG (*cringingly*) : Harriet, you surely will forgive me—You, the personification of all excellence, all perfection, to whom we Men are infinitely inferior——

HARRIET (*cruelly*) : Mr. Hogg, I perceive with indignation your continued flattery, which you have persisted in ever since I knew you.—I would be grateful if you would desist from it in future.

SHELLEY (*lashes him*) : Oh, how the Sophistry of Passions has changed you ! . . . The sport of a Woman's Whim, the Plaything of her Inconsistencies—the Bauble with which she is angry—the Footstool of her Exaltation ! . . . Assert yourself—Be what you were—Bid you, a man,

be a God ! . . . But do not love one who cannot return it—and who, if she could, ought to stifle her desire to do so !—Love is not a Whirlwind that it is unvanquishable ! . . .

HOGG (*humbly*) : You are right—I am overcome with pain and remorse—I will leave you now, and never inflict myself on you again—until you desire it—Or unless you care to challenge me to a Duel, and allow me to defend my honour ? . . .

HARRIET (*cuttingly*) : Your Honour ? . . . I should have thought it was *mine* which was at stake !

SHELLEY (*firmly*) : Certainly not, Hogg—I have no right to take Another's Life—or to expose my own.

HOGG (*proudly*) : But I have a sense of Honour——

SHELLEY (*sorrowfully*) : And I of Right—I leave you to your Fate, Hogg—Would that I could rescue you !—But it is an unavailing wish for departed Excellence—and Friendship ! . . .

HOGG (*sadly*) : Farewell, then, Shelley—and Harriet, goodbye—Perhaps when we are older and wiser—with less quick passions and prejudices—we may meet again——

[*He bows to each of them, picks up his hat and coat, and goes out quickly stage Back. As they stand watching him, ELIZA appears in the Doorway of her Room.*]

ELIZA (*with relief*) : Thank goodness that abominable Young Man has gone !——

SHELLEY (*turning and seeing her*) : Why, Eliza ! . . . What has brought you here so rapidly ?—I didn't expect you for another Week at least.

ELIZA (*brusquely*) : Nor I you.—But on hearing you had rushed to Sussex, leaving my precious Harriet to the tender mercies of that atrocious

Young Lawyer, I caught the first Mail Coach I could to York !——

HARRIET (*anxiously*) : And delighted we are to see you, aren't we, Bysshe ? . . .

SHELLEY (*stammering*) : Of course. . . . Naturally. . . . Very right and proper, I am sure ! . . . But now you will have to continue your travels again, I fear——

ELIZA (*taken aback*) : Our Travels ?—What do you mean ?—I have only just unpacked, in that vilely uncomfortable Room ! . . .

SHELLEY (*determinedly*) : Well, I trust the next won't be even worse !—But I am determined to shake the dust of this place off my feet at once—and take you and Harriet to the uncontaminated air of the Mountains and Lakes—in Cumberland, Wales, or Ireland—I care not where—so long as it is unpolluted by his breath ! . . .

HARRIET (*reluctantly*) : Don't be too bitter, Bysshe—and perhaps I *did* give him a little encouragement ! . . .

ELIZA (*tartly*) : Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Child !—But *He* was old enough to know better.—In any case, I plump for the Lakes—Keswick, for instance—where I understand the rain is very good for the Complexion, and the gloss of the Hair——

SHELLEY (*dreamily*) : What is more important still, Robert Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge live and work there—and might encourage me——

ELIZA (*snappishly*) : Damp your ardour, you mean,—while I continue my upbringing of Harriet, which has been sadly interrupted by Marriage and Men.—Come and help me to re-pack at once, Child—and don't dare eat any more tea, which is most injurious to your digestion !

HARRIET (*fretfully, who has begun eating again*) :

But I am hungry, Eliza—and *you* interrupted our tea !——

ELIZA (*peremptorily*) : If you exhausted yourself less with Books and Young Men you would not need so much tea.—Follow me at once, and help with my Boxes. (*Leading the way to her Room.*)

HARRIET (*dutifully*) : Very well, Eliza—I will come—— (*Looking back at SHELLEY with a wry smile.*) Anon, my dearest——

SHELLEY (*affectionately*) : Anon, my darling—— (*Looking after them with a grimace.*) Oh, good Heavens !—Have I got rid of one Fiend only to let in Another ? . . . (*In disgust and rage, He picks up ELIZA's Shawl and Bonnet, flinging them through her Door, as He crys out*) : Here ! . . . take your Bonnet and Shawl—and pack yourself up for good and all ! . . .

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

SCENE I

THE PARLOUR OF THE GODWINS'
HOUSE IN SKINNER STREET, JULY
1814

The GODWIN family are all assembled for dinner.

WILLIAM GODWIN, *a small, bold, stout man, dressed like a dissenting minister.*

MRS. GODWIN, *a coarse, vulgar old woman, badly dressed in black velvet, with green spectacles.*

JANE (CLAIRE) CLAIRMONT (*her daughter*), *a dark, brilliant, vivacious creature of sixteen, attractively dressed.*

FANNY IMLAY (*GODWIN's step-child*), *a plain, dull girl, shabbily dressed, with a kind, but morbid temperament.*

MR. GODWIN *is pacing about the room, growing impatient as he has to wait for his dinner.* MRS. GODWIN and FANNY *are fussing about the table, while CLAIRE is gazing out of the window, C. Back, holding a copy of "Political Justice," by William Godwin.*

GODWIN (*irritably*): Is Mr. Shelley never coming? . . . It is four o'clock, and I have waited half an hour for my dinner!—It's monstrous! My stomach is not accustomed to such irregularities.

MRS. GODWIN (*soothingly*): Never mind, William, it will enjoy it all the more! Besides, it's the true sign of a poet.—If Mr. Shelley were punctual I should doubt his genius.

GODWIN (*grumpily*) : I prefer manners to genius at meal-time. And where is my daughter Mary, I should like to know ?

JANE : I expect she is at St. Pancras' Churchyard, where she generally goes to "moon" on fine days ! . . .

MRS. GODWIN : St. Pancras' Churchyard of all places !—When she ought to be helping me in the kitchen !—

GODWIN : Or improving her mind by attending to her studies.—(*Turning to FANNY.*) But what does she do there all the time, Fanny ?

FANNY (*offended*) : You know perfectly well, Papa ; she sits reading by the grave of dear Mamma.

GODWIN (*unctuously*) : Ah ! poor Mary Wollstonecraft ! . . . How her daughters have taken after her !

MRS. GODWIN : I call it most depressing and unwholesome.—I wonder you allow it, William.—I hope you won't permit any of *my* children to "moon" by my grave when I have passed away—a most unhealthy practice !

JANE (*tartly*) : Perhaps none of us would care to, dear Mamma !

MRS. GODWIN : Don't be pert, Jane.—Anyway, I trust you would have more sense.

JANE (*looking out of the window again*) : Why, look ! there they are together !

FANNY (*running up to the window*) : Who ? . . . What ? . . . Let me see !

JANE : Mary and Shelley—coming up the street, arm-in-arm, looking as though they had walked into another world !—

FANNY (*aside to herself*) : Perhaps they have—I often wish *I* could. . . .

JANE : And Mary is wearing that tartan dress she got in Scotland, when she stayed with the Baxters !—She is certainly got up to kill !

MRS. GODWIN (*going up to window*) : I call it perfectly indecent going about with a married

man like that ! . . . William, I wonder you permit it ?—What will his poor little wife say ?—You must stop it at once, and speak severely to Mr. Shelley.

GODWIN (*firmly*) : Most decidedly I will—besides reminding him of my belated dinner !

JANE (*laughing derisively*) : Oh, that will be delightful, Papa ! The Professor of Emancipation lecturing his disciple on morality, decency, and all the other deadly virtues !

MRS. GODWIN : Jane ! remember who your step-father is—and treat him with respect !

JANE (*mockingly*) : That's precisely what I'm doing—the world-renowned author of “ Political Justice ” ! (*She makes him a mock curtsey*).

GODWIN (*severely*) : Jane ! behave yourself !—I will not have such ribaldry in my house.—If I were not so famished, I would read you a lecture on the complications of free love. . . .

[*Sound of footsteps and voices approaching door C. Back.*]

But here they are, thank Heavens, so we can sit down to dinner at last !

[*The Door opens as he is speaking, and MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN and SHELLEY come in. She is a tall, slim, fair-haired girl of 17 with a pale face, wide forehead, and great earnest, hazel eyes. SHELLEY looks ill, with bloodshot eyes, and disordered hair and dress, as though he had aged and suffered much since the preceding scene. He and MARY both appear to have been through some emotional crisis, which gives them a rapt, distraught air. MARY is holding a copy of SHELLEY'S “ Queen Mab ” tightly under her arm, as MRS. GODWIN turns on her furiously.*]

MRS. GODWIN (*furiously*) : Mary ! what is the meaning of this ? . . .

GODWIN (*angrily*) : Why are you so late, Mr. Shelley ?—Mrs. Godwin and I have been waiting dinner this half-hour !—

MARY (*apologetically*) : I am sorry, Papa, but I met Mr. Shelley—quite by chance——

MRS. GODWIN (*sarcastically*) : No doubt ! . . .

MARY : In St. Pancras' Churchyard——

JANE (*knowingly*) : As I said——

MARY : And we talked philosophy so intently that we were quite oblivious to time—or food !——

MRS. GODWIN (*tartly*) : So it seems !—But unfortunately the rest of us are human, and cannot subsist on graves and philosophy !

SHELLEY (*breaking in, to GODWIN*) : I was on my way here to dinner, as you know, sir, but I found Mary so disconsolate, that I strove to cheer her spirits——

GODWIN : And succeeded admirably—judging from her expression ! But our family are starving—so with your permission, we will proceed straight to dinner.

[*He offers his arm to MRS. GODWIN.*]

SHELLEY : By all means, sir, and I will follow you when I have shaken the dust from my shoes. . . . (*Going towards outer Door.*)

FANNY (*to herself*) : Like the old Disciples !—How romantic ! . . .

MARY : And when I have removed my bonnet and shawl, Papa.

GODWIN : Very well, Mary, but don't waste time prinking.

MRS. GODWIN : Our appetites won't stand the strain any longer, I assure you, Mr. Shelley.

GODWIN : Jane and Fanny !—follow on at once.

FANNY (*following dutifully*) : Yes, Papa, we are quite prepared.

[*MR. and MRS. GODWIN sweep out of the room, through door on Right, followed by FANNY and JANE, who catches hold of MARY'S hand as she goes through the door, grabbing the Book from her hand.*]

JANE (*inquisitively*) : What have you got there, Mary ?

MARY (*trying to retrieve it*) : A very precious book of Shelley's—give it to me——

JANE : No—Let me see what it is—(*reading*) “Queen Mab” ! Oh, I *must* read it !

MARY (*clutching hold of it*) : No. . . . No . . . it's my own special copy—Shelley gave it to me—give it back to me at once——

JANE (*opening it*) : What's this ?—An inscription ? . . . “You see, Mary, I have not forgotten.” . . . What does that mean, pray ?

MARY (*seizing it*) : Give it to me, Jane ; I told you you were not to look at it—it's something between Shelley and me—and nothing to do with you whatever.

JANE (*offended*) : Oh, very well, Miss Hoity-Toity, but you may need my assistance soon, and be glad of my sympathy before long ! . . .

[*She flounces out after the others into the Dining-Room. MARY shrugs her shoulders despairingly, takes off her bonnet and shawl, and is about to follow her, when SHELLEY reappears from door on Left.*

SHELLEY (*coming towards her*) : Mary ! I must speak to you a moment before we join the others.

MARY (*turning to him*) : What is it, Bysshe ? . . .

SHELLEY (*desperately*) : You know very well what it is. . . . We can't go on like this. . . . It's driving me nearly mad ! . . .

MARY : What is ? . . . I don't understand. . . .

SHELLEY (*passionately*) : Oh yes, you do. . . . Don't be modest with me. . . . All that I told you in the Churchyard, beside your Mother's grave—all my hopes and fears,—my anguish, my unhappiness, my loneliness, and misery . . . my marriage . . . and poverty . . . my failure in writing . . . everything. . . .

MARY (*sympathetically*) : My poor Shelley. . . . You must not say such things ! . . . You must let me cheer and comfort you . . . my dear. . . .

SHELLEY (*taking her hands*) : You do . . . you do . . . But that again is the trouble . . . you comfort me so much that I cannot look upon you just as a friend—as I should——

MARY (*earnestly*) : But you must—Bysshe—you must——

SHELLEY (*wildly*) : I cannot—it's impossible—I've tried—ever since I first saw you in this room last month, standing under Opie's portrait of your Mother.—But I cannot struggle any longer—my mind has become like a little kingdom suffering an insurrection.

MARY (*fingering his Coat*) : Poor Shelley ! . . . Why are your eyes so bloodshot, and your hair and dress so awry ? . . .

SHELLEY (*frantically*) : You know why perfectly well. . . . And because of this . . . (*He pulls a bottle of Laudanum out of his pocket*)—I carry it always with me . . . I never part from it !

MARY (*horrified*) : Oh ! you must be careful ! You might kill yourself by accident ! . . .

SHELLEY : Or intent. . . . The other night I tried to . . . I wanted to finish the whole sorry business, after I left you——

MARY (*trembling with shock*) : Shelley ! . . . How terrible ! . . .

SHELLEY : Then I stopped—just in time—for I thought of how—if supported by you—I might enroll my name among the great and good who have been some use to humanity. . . .

MARY : Oh, Bysshe, do I really inspire you to that extent ? . . .

SHELLEY : You have the subtlest, and most exquisitely fashioned intelligence, of any woman I have ever met——

MARY (*delightedly*) : You flatterer !

SHELLEY (*romantically*) : It's true.—I have no interest in anyone except you.—Your thoughts strike sparks in me,—but without you my mind

is dead,—and cold as the midnight river, when the moon is down.

MARY : And as for me, when you leave after dinner,—when I go to my room,—there is no sweet Shelley, no dear love——

SHELLEY : Oh ! how lonely and desolate are my solitary nights—except for dreams of you—and of the impossible. . . .

MARY : But, Bysshe, what do you mean ? . . . What are you suggesting ?——

SHELLEY (*sensibly*) : Don't you see, my dearest girl, there is Harriet and our child Ianthe—and money, to be considered.

MARY (*callously*) : I know . . . I know. . . . But Harriet treats you with such unremitting selfishness—surely you are justified in leaving her ? . . .

SHELLEY : She is a noble little animal, but she is no companion to me now.—She used to read and philosophise, but all she cares about now are bonnets, plate, and carriages—and going into shops to spend money which we don't possess.

MARY (*harshly*) : And yet it is impossible to knock into such people's heads that they are selfish and unfeeling——

SHELLEY (*vindictively*) : But you don't know her sister Eliza ! She is far worse ! How I hate her ! . . . She is a Fiend in disguise !

MARY : Is she still with you ? . . . What is she like ? . . .

SHELLEY : Yes—she is a vile and loathsome Worm that cannot sting, but it makes me sick with disgust to see her caressing my little Ianthe—whom Harriet refuses to nurse——

MARY : What an unnatural Mother !—Oh, Bysshe, if only you could escape from the whole sorry crew ? . . .

SHELLEY : There is no escape—I am caught in a net of my own weaving—but what I am seeking is someone who cares more for Ideas than bonnets and carriages !

MARY : You should have known my Mother—*she* was the woman for you—full of intellect, sympathy, and understanding——

SHELLEY (*taking her hands and drawing her to him tenderly*) : Her daughter is enough for me. . . . Mary, when I am with you, I feel comforted and revived, and strong enough to face the hard-heartedness of mankind. . . .

MARY (*softly*) : I feel there is eternity in these precious moments with you, Bysshe—they contain the elixir of immortal life. . . .

SHELLEY (*taking her in his arms passionately*) : It is the most ancient language which Passion can alone translate. . . . Mary !—I believe I might become in your hands what Harriet did in mine.—And yet how different.—How devoted and affectionate.—How you might mould me to something worthy and noble ! . . .

MARY : But no more noble than you are this moment.—And yet—you did not seem happy today when we were together ? . . .

SHELLEY (*unhappily*) : For a few moments I had the most exquisite pleasure—and then I was absent and dejected—for I did not know when we might meet again—when I might hold you in my arms, and gaze into your dear eyes, and snatch momentary bliss in the midst of one happy hour. . . .

MARY : How you philosophise and reason about love ! . . . I cannot reason, but I can put it into practice——

SHELLEY (*determinedly*) : And you are more perfect in the practice than I in the theory. . . . Mary ! we must be united . . . we must devise some scheme. . . . First of all, I must tell your Father.—He is a philosopher with the widest views.—He will help and advise us, I am assured.

MARY (*disengaging herself quickly*) : Shh ! . . . Here he is ! . . . He will have grown impatient

with us not going into dinner.—I will slip away upstairs, to put away my bonnet, whilst you explain matters to him.

[*GODWIN re-enters impatiently, with a napkin tucked into his coat, while MARY slips away through doorway on Right.*

GODWIN : Ah, Shelley !—Do you live on air ? —I know you are not a carnivorous animal like me, but there are plates of vegetables awaiting you, and some strong green tea—gunpowder tea, I call it—for which Mrs. Godwin says you have a preference.

SHELLEY (*politely*) : Thank you, sir—but your daughter and I have been too busy discussing matters of such importance as to forget the existence of even a vegetarian diet.

GODWIN (*surprised*) : Indeed !—And what, pray, have been these matters of such importance between my daughter and yourself ?

SHELLEY (*boldly*) : The truth is, sir, that I love Mary—and I believe she loves me—and we wish to ask your blessing and advice as to what course is open to us ?—as the philosophical Oracle of our age—

GODWIN (*astonished and furious*) : You wish to ask my blessing ? . . . And advice—on such a question ? . . . You have the effrontery to come to me—you, a married man, with a wife and child—and tell me that you love my daughter—an unmarried girl of seventeen—hardly out of the schoolroom ? . . . In sooth, sir, I have never heard such impertinence in my life ! . . .

SHELLEY : But, sir, I thought that you, as the author of “ Political Justice ”, would be broad-minded enough to accept such a situation with equanimity and composure ?

GODWIN (*bursting out*) : Equanimity and composure !—Do you expect me to hear your brazen confession of licentiousness and wickedness with anything but horror and disgust ?—

How dare you, Shelley, enter my house, eat at my table, enjoy my society, and that of my family, and then seduce my daughter from every canon of virtue and honour, under my very nose? . . .

SHELLEY : But we are only putting into practice what you yourself laid down in ethics—that one should follow one's Heart's dictates, and that no convention should hold one to a marriage which has become an empty farce.

GODWIN (*coldly*) : I have philosophised for the world, but not for my own family—and I do not propose to encourage blatant immorality in my own house. . . . You are a married man, and Mary is a virgin—I therefore forbid you to have any connection with her whatsoever—or in fact to see her ever again.

SHELLEY (*desperately*) : But, sir, that is too cruel!—when you have opened your doors wide to me for the last few months, and encouraged me to become an inmate of your family circle.—You have even—although I am loth to mention it—allowed me to afford you such pecuniary aid as I have been able to give you.

GODWIN (*sternly*) : That, sir, was a business matter between you and me.—This is a moral matter between you and Mary, and I absolutely forbid you to have any further communication with her whatsoever.

SHELLEY (*sadly*) : Mr. Godwin, I respect you more than any human being I have ever known.—You are the man who first awakened the desire for knowledge, and the betterment of the human race, within me. . . . It is painfully disillusioning, therefore, to discover that your character so utterly contradicts your convictions. . . .

GODWIN (*haughtily*) : My public and my private convictions are two quite separate matters—as I have already explained to you. And as for my character, it is not for the Disciple to criti-

cise his Master.—Where would the Christian religion have been, in that case?

[MARY *reappears in the doorway as he speaks.*

Once again, I absolutely forbid you to see Mary again.

MARY (*distraught*) : Papa ! What are you saying ? . . . You cannot do such a thing ! . . . You cannot forbid Shelley to see me again ! . . .

GODWIN (*firmly*) : I can and I do.—I entirely disapprove of any daughter of mine consorting with a reprobate of his dangerous principles.

MARY (*desperately*) : But they are *your* principles, Papa !—They are all founded on your doctrines and writings !

GODWIN (*pompously*) : Then I do not approve of their practical demonstration, and I will not have a child of mine held up to shame and scorn by the world—or allow you to lay yourself open to the abuse and calumny of Mrs. Shelley.

SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : My wife is not living with me at the moment, sir, nor has she done so for some months past. She has taken up her abode at Bath, with her sister Eliza, and my child Ianthe . . . as she appears to have no desire to be with me any longer.

GODWIN (*prudishly*) : Then the sooner you recall her to London the better.—A young wife's place is beside her husband.—This is no time for you to be separated, being lately wed, with a small child.

MARY (*interrupting*) : But Shelley and Harriet have nothing in common, Papa. Their marriage is a hollow sham and mockery.—She is obsessed with worldly pleasures and pursuits, which he naturally despises. . . .

GODWIN (*sharply*) : That is a matter on which you are not entitled to give an opinion, Mary. Mr. and Mrs. Shelley must adjust their own

lives to their own satisfaction, but I insist that you take no part in that adjustment. Do you understand, Mary?

MARY (*meekly*) : Yes, Papa.

GODWIN (*finally*) : And I have intimated to Mr. Shelley that I should be obliged if he does not frequent Skinner Street again for the present—until this—er—infatuation is overcome.

MARY (*heatedly*) : It is *not* an infatuation, Papa—
—and it will not be overcome !

GODWIN : Silence—Mary !—I will not be contradicted.—

SHELLEY (*resigning himself*) : As you please, Mr. Godwin. Your house is naturally your own sanctuary—

MARY (*rebelliously*) : But not a Prison-house for your Daughter, whom you have brought up to be free and independent—

GODWIN (*firmly*) : You were always bold and imperious, but I will not allow you to become a hoyden, Mary.—You may have been nurtured in an atmosphere of free thought, but I insist that you follow the ordinary conventions of life.—If I find you disobedient, I shall take steps to remove you from London immediately.

MARY (*frightenedly*) : But, Papa !—Where would you send me ? . . . I could not leave London just now—it's impossible—where could I go ?

GODWIN (*cruelly*) : That is for your Step-Mother and me to decide.—Meanwhile, I shall put you in her custody.—You could either return to the Baxters at Dundee, or to some other salubrious resort, which would benefit your health and principles, no doubt.

SHELLEY : Principles ! . . . I should have thought there were enough in Skinner Street, without going far afield for more !

GODWIN (*cuttingly*) : There are principles *and* principles, Mr. Shelley, and yours and mine do not appear to tally at the moment.—Mary, you

had better retire to your room—without any dinner—while Mrs. Godwin and I decide what is the best arrangement for you.

[MARY goes sulkily to the Door on Right, which MR. GODWIN holds open for her.

GODWIN : Good-day, Mr. Shelley, you know your way out, I think—— Good-day——
(*Indicating the Outer Door Left.*)

[GODWIN then retires pompously through the door into Dining-room, while SHELLEY picks up his hat disconsolately, and moves towards outer door on Left. As he does so, MARY reappears at the inner Door Right, looks to see if GODWIN has gone, then calls out softly to SHELLEY.

MARY (*thrillingly*) : Shelley !

SHELLEY (*turning in Doorway*) : Mary !

MARY (*running to him*) : You can't leave me like this without a word—in spite of what Papa said—— When are we going to meet again ?—When am I going to see you, my dearest one ? . . .

SHELLEY (*holding her in his arms*) : My own beloved Mary.—I know not.—My mind is in a turmoil.—I almost feel despair to see how cold and worldly Godwin has become.——

MARY : Do not listen to him—he only philosophises, from having read more books that are not worth reading, than any man in England.—But he knows nothing of love. . . .

SHELLEY (*mystified*) : And yet he lived with your Mother before they were married—when she was still Mary Imlay !——

MARY : Like all parents, Bysshe, he has one rule for himself and another for his children !

SHELLEY : I am shocked and staggered at his cold injustice.—Why will he not follow the natural bent of his affections and be reconciled to us ?——

MARY : Because of his prejudices—the World—and Mrs. Godwin—all these forbid it.—Perhaps one day I will have a Father—not a Monster !

SHELLEY : You are right—he is changed, and full of prejudices.—Besides, he expects such universal homage from anyone younger than himself.

MARY : That is usual in the old—but perhaps you have been too indignant and unjust to him about ourselves?—

SHELLEY : On the contrary, he was full of cutting cruelty—but we must not resign an inch of hope.—I will wither up his selfish soul by piecemeal ! . . .

MARY (*humorously*) : I wish I could do that to Mrs. Godwin !—

SHELLEY : Has she been more disagreeable than usual, of late?—

MARY (*shuddering*) : No—but I shudder to think of her.—She is a most disgusting woman, with her biting tongue, black velvet, and green spectacles,—and she plagues poor Papa out of his life.

SHELLEY : Why does he allow it?

MARY : How can he avoid it?—He married her, and must now take the consequences.

SHELLEY : Like all husbands—the most long-suffering race on earth !—But how can I leave you in such a household?—at the mercy of such a Woman, and with that cold calculating Man?—

MARY (*ardently*) : I care not for them.—But why cannot I be with you always, to cheer and comfort you?—You, who have no friends, and nowhere to lay your head. . . . Why should you be torn from me just when you need me most?—and I need you? . . .

SHELLEY (*impulsively*) : We will not be—we *shall* not be— Why should we not go away together? . . . Harriet cares nothing for me—in fact, I have evidence that she has already been unfaithful to me—with a certain Major Ryan. . . .

MARY (*disgusted*) : How horrible !—She must be utterly detestable and unprincipled, if she could abandon you for anyone else.

SHELLEY : I believe—although I cannot prove it—that the child she will have in a few months' time is not mine, but Ryan's—

MARY (*horrified*) : How shameful ! . . . Tell me no more—I cannot bear to think of all she has made you suffer.—But let us defy them all ?—our Family, our Friends, and our Enemies—for all I can see, they are each as bad as the other—and then we should never part more ? . . .

SHELLEY (*exultantly*) : Ah ! sweet Elf, why should we not soar over the mountains and seas, and pounce on some little spot ?—a house with a lawn, a river, or lake, noble trees, and divine hills—these should be our little mouse-hole to creep into ?—

MARY (*looking towards the Window*) : Oh, how much better it would be not to be able to see the light of the sun for Mountains rather than for Houses !—

SHELLEY : Would it not be better to creep into the loathliest cave, so that we might just be together ? . . .

MARY (*ecstatically*) : Of course—but how I long to be in a home of our own !—Would it not be wonderful to be settled, where nothing could trouble us ?—neither friends, family, nor enemies—nothing to disturb us, studying and working, eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, together . . . alone with each other—always together—

SHELLEY (*desperately*) : How terrible instead, if I should have to pass month after month without you—only seeing you in snatches and moments !—

MARY (*holding him close*) : Oh, Bysshe, I love you too passionately to be absent long.—Why cannot I be with you always to cheer you, and press you to my heart ?—as now ? . . .

SHELLEY (*determinedly*) : Mary, we must go away together—those who love like us cannot separate.—Let us postchaise to Dover, and then take ship to Calais, and on through France and Italy—to warmth and sunshine.—Away from all our Friends and Enemies—together—alone—for ever——

MARY : But *how* can we go, Bysshe ? . . . There is Harriet—Ianthe—My Father—Jane—Fanny—and Mrs. Godwin——

SHELLEY (*passionately*) : What do they matter ? . . . What do any of them matter ?—except us.—You are the only thing that matters to me, Mary.—Come with me—come—and we will start afresh—all over again—under warm southern skies. . . .

MARY (*longingly*) : Oh ! that we could !—What bliss it would be !——

SHELLEY (*rapidly*) : I will order a chaise to be ready by four o'clock to-night—and I will watch outside the house till the stars grow pale.—I will go now—and make all arrangements.—If you will but come to me ? . . . Mary, do you promise ? . . . Will you come ? . . .

[*He gazes into her eyes beseechingly as she hesitates a moment.*]

MARY (*making up her mind*) : Shelley, I will come. . . . I will pack my belongings—and be ready by four—if you will but get the money and make all provision—and we shall never part again.—Is not that a delightful word ? . . . 'Never again' . . . It will cheer the hours while I wait. . . .

SHELLEY (*looking up at the Grandfather Clock*) : Tomorrow I will hold you forever.—Oh, that eternal Clock !—Would I could "fright the steeds of lazy-pacéd time" !—If I am absent from you long, I shudder with fright at myself, and have terrible dreams. . . .

MARY (*nervously*) : Shh ! . . . I hear someone coming ! Be careful—be discreet.

[As she speaks JANE comes in from the Dining-room, sensing some intrigue.

MARY (*whispering with relief*): Oh, it's only Jane. . . . Shall we tell her our plans?—She is discretion itself, and would give us any help and assistance we may need.

JANE (*coming towards them*): Why, Bysshe?—and Mary?—What plots are you two hatching? . . . Why haven't you come into dinner?—(*Sniffing.*) There is an air of schemes and intrigues in here! . . .

SHELLEY: You are right, Jane.—Mary and I have been hatching hard—and the Chicken is about to come out of the shell!

JANE (*shuddering*): But the atmosphere in the dining-room is worse—it is like a volcano.—Everyone is fidgeting about as though they were sitting on a crater—which may blow up at any moment!—I had to escape in here for some air.—

MARY: That is the way Bysshe and I feel about the whole house, Jane—so we are going to escape tonight to Dover!—then France—Italy—and Heaven! . . .

JANE (*excitedly*): Oh! Mary! do you mean it? . . . How wonderful! . . . How perfectly thrilling! . . . But you can't leave me in this awful house?—You can't abandon me to this terrible existence? . . . I should go mad—or commit suicide—if you left me here along with Papa, and Fanny, and Mamma! . . .

MARY (*making up her mind*): Then you must come with us, Jane—you must accompany us.—You would not mind if she *did* so, would you, Bysshe?

SHELLEY: Certainly not—but I would only allow her to come on one condition.

JANE: And what is that, pray?

SHELLEY (*insistently*): That you change your name to something else—I can live with any

number of women, but not with anyone called "Jane" !

JANE (*agreeing with alacrity*) : You are right, Shelley—I can't abide it myself. "Jane" is such a dull, prosaic name, which a Woman like Mamma would be sure to give me. But *you* shall christen me something else.—What about Claire ? . . . Claire Clairemont ? . . . there is more magic and poetry in that, don't you think ? . . .

SHELLEY (*settling it*) : Then Claire it shall be—from henceforth and forever !

MARY : And she will be most useful to us as an Interpreter, as her French is very much more adequate than yours or mine.

SHELLEY : Good—then that is settled.—You must both creep out of the house tonight, and it only remains for me to make all the travelling arrangements.—Au revoir, my dears, (*moving towards Doorway Centre Back*) until tonight, when I shall be waiting outside, at the corner of Skinner Street, with a post-chaise at 4 a.m.—so don't be late—if we are to reach Dover by dawn.

[*He goes to the Outer Door and opens it, but as he does so he falls back at the sight of* HARRIET.

SHELLEY (*horror-stricken*) : Harriet !—Good God !—What has brought you here ?

HARRIET (*facing him boldly in the Doorway*) : Your letter to me at Bath, telling me of your association with this household. (*She looks round scornfully at MARY and CLAIRE, advancing as she speaks.*) I thought I should find you here with your—paramour. . . .

SHELLEY (*interposing between them*) : Hold your tongue, Harriet.—I will not allow you to insult Mary so.

HARRIET : It is *I* who am insulted—by your behaviour with her.

MARY (*with dignity*) : Really, Mrs. Shelley, I don't know what you mean !

HARRIET (*turning on her*) : Oh, yes you do.—*You* are to blame entirely.—*You* have stolen Shelley away from me—from his Wife and Child——

MARY (*haughtily*) : I have done nothing of the kind.—Shelley has come to me of his own free will—I have tried to persuade him to return to you—but he assures me it is impossible.

HARRIET (*turning on Shelley*) : Her Father's books are responsible for it all—Godwin has made you profligate and sensual——

SHELLEY (*loyally*) : He has done nothing of the kind—I owe all my philosophy and principles of life to his “Political Justice”.

HARRIET (*sarcastically*) : And for that reason, I suppose, you have promised to lend him £3000 which you have not got?—on the mortgage of your Father's estate,—while your Child and I have been living on fourteen shillings of ready money. . . .

SHELLEY (*contradicting*) : That is a lie, Harriet.—I arranged with Hookham, the publisher, to send you money from the proceeds of “Queen Mab”. . . .

HARRIET (*cuttingly*) : Which I have never received, and which you no doubt have been spending here,—on those who have seduced you from your duties as a Husband and Father.

CLAIRE (*interrupting*) : We have done nothing of the kind, Mrs. Shelley ! . . .

MARY : How dare you accuse me of such a thing ? . . .

HARRIET (*turning on her*) : Because it is true.—You are determined to get Bysshe. . . . You have heated his imagination by talking of your dead Mother, and by going to her grave with him each day.—He was always susceptible to graves—and telling him you were dying of love for him—as I once did—when I prevailed on him to elope with me from Mrs. Fenning's Academy——

MARY (*furiously*) : I have done nothing of the sort !—You are making the most disgraceful assertions.

HARRIET (*cynically*) : Oh no, I am not.—Because I have done it all before myself, so I know what I'm talking about.—Besides, your vehement expostulations and violent gestures belie you.

SHELLEY (*soothingly*) : But Harriet, listen to me—calm yourself a moment.—Why should we not all live together, peacefully and happily ?—you as my Sister, and Mary as my Wife ?—

HARRIET (*laughing hysterically*) : And Jane to complete the Harem, no doubt ! . . . Shelley !—You can't really mean that ? . . . Can you imagine such a thing possible ? . . . Could you conceive of Mary and me living under the same roof as you, sharing you as our Husband ?—a veritable Seraglio !

SHELLEY : No, Harriet, you would be my Sister—our Comrade—our Companion.—Why not ? . . . I have known stranger and more improbable things occur, and prove a success.

HARRIET (*resentfully*) : It's impossible—utterly impossible—I could never live with you again after this.—I have been so deceived, so cruelly treated, that I can never forget it.—You will have much to answer for, Bysshe, for you have been the cause of intense misery to me and mine. . . .

SHELLEY (*intensely*) : But Harriet, I am thinking of you and your feelings all the time.—If only Mary and I could get the better of this passion, but it has overpowered us—obsessed us—burnt us up like a flame !—

HARRIET (*vixenishly*) : It is degrading and vile—degrading to you—and vile of her—to steal a Husband from his Wife and Child—she is a common thief, with whom the law should deal !—

SHELLEY (*shocked and disgusted*) : Harriet !—How can you say such things ? . . . It is shameful and untrue !

MARY (*pathetically*) : You do not understand, Mrs. Shelley.—If Shelley leaves me now, I should die ! . . .

HARRIET (*jeeringly*) : Didn't I tell you so ? . . . And what of me ? . . . Am I not dying a thousand deaths ? . . . Are you not killing me every moment ?—between you,—with your cruelty and wickedness ? . . . How am I to live, I should like to know ? . . . What do you expect me to do ? . . . Yes, tell me that ? . . . Do you realise I am about to have a Child in a few months' time ?—by this depraved Father, who abandons me, and will not own it. . . . You did not think of that in the midst of your passion, did you ? . . . You only thought of yourselves, and your own sinful cravings. . . .

SHELLEY (*interrupting angrily*) : Harriet ! . . . Stop ! . . . I will not allow you to say more ! . . . My attachment to Mary neither could nor ought to be overcome. . . . Our spirits and hearts are united in a way which yours and mine never were.—We met with passion, not with intent or design—and she has resigned all to me—

MARY (*resignedly*) : But Bysshe, I am willing to give it all up—to resign all hope of happiness again—if it will benefit you ?—

SHELLEY (*passionately*) : But it would not—Harriet has never filled my heart with an all-devouring passion such as this—and She knows it.—Friendship and pity were its basis—not passion or impulse—

HARRIET (*bitterly*) : Ah, Bysshe . . . none of your tenderness remains—I can see that.—You are no longer the pure and good Being you were—nor can you ever retrieve yourself.—You are a Vampire now—your character is blasted for ever.—Nothing can save you now—the Man I loved is dead. . . .

SHELLEY (*sincerely*) : Harriet. . . . I am united to another now—in mind and spirit.—You are no longer my Wife—there is no longer any affinity between us.—Perhaps I have done you an injury—but I assure you most innocently and unintentionally—by having any connection with you in the first place, when you were a young, untutored School-girl. But I trust one day you may be awakened by someone more noble and worthier than I, and find a lover as passionate and faithful as I am your friend—

HARRIET : Thank you for your fine sentiments ! . . . But your noble soul has become debased ! . . . The pure and enlightened philosophy you once delighted in, has flown.—Money, and the World, not Philosophy, is now the main-spring of your actions.—

SHELLEY : On what grounds can you make such a cruel and unfounded assertion ?

HARRIET (*meaningly*) : I understand Mr. Godwin has sold his Daughters lately for a substantial sum.—

MARY (*turning to him*) : Shelley !—Did you ever hear such calumny in your life ? . . .

SHELLEY : Harriet !—You know that to be false.—How can you make such contemptible assertions ? . . . The truth is, that Godwin refuses to have any further communication with me, or to allow Mary to consort with me further—

CLAIRE (*interrupting*) : In fact he has just turned Shelley out of the house.—And I fear he may return at any moment, Bysshe. . . .

SHELLEY : So it is wanton cruelty and injustice to spread such a report, Harriet, which is utterly untrue.—

HARRIET : How do I know that ? . . . What am I to believe ? . . .

SHELLEY (*gently*) : Surely you can take my word for it ? . . . You think that I have injured you,

but since I first beheld you, I have overwhelmed you with benefits—— Even now, when a violent and lasting passion for another leads me to prefer her society to yours, I am perpetually employed in devising how I can be permanently and truly useful to you.

HARRIET (*violently*) : You have never been useful to me in your life.—You have brought nothing but shame and misery on me since I first met you . . . and I never want to see you again.

[*She takes her ring off her finger, and flings it at*
SHELLEY.

HARRIET : There !—take it !—I will be bound to you no longer.—If you will be free, then so will I—to lead my own life, and go my own way, irrespective of all that there was between us——

[*She goes to the Doorway, and with a last disdainful look at MARY, flounces out.*

CLAIRE (*with relief*) : Thank heavens for that ! . . . I hope Papa has not heard the earthquake !——

[*Mrs. Godwin's voice is heard calling from the dining-room, "JANE ! . . . JANE ! . . . Are you never coming ? . . . Your soup is getting cold !"*

CLAIRE (*going towards Dining-room Door*) : I must fly—or there will be the devil to pay.—Good-bye, Shelley—until tonight——

[*She runs out.*

SHELLEY (*moving towards Outer Door*) : And so must I—there are the Horses to order and Tickets to pay for, to Dover and Calais——

MARY (*following him*) : Dearest Percy—are you sure you can afford it ? . . .

SHELLEY (*exultantly*) : With you, Mary, I am the richest man on earth—and if not, we can always walk !—with me to carry you——

MARY (*tenderly*) : Till tonight, my dearest. . . . Adieu. . . .

[*She goes to the Inner Door Left.*

[*GODWIN's voice is heard from the Dining-room,*
"MARY ! . . . MARY ! . . . Have you gone to your
room ? . . . I am coming to give you some instruction
shortly."

MARY (*dutifully*) : Yes, Papa. . . . I am just
going. . . . (*Whispering.*) Good-bye, my darling
. . . until tonight. . . .

[*SHELLEY disappears through the Outer Door, and
MARY into her room, as GODWIN comes out of the
Dining-room, brandishing a knife and fork, with a
napkin tucked into his cravat, looks round suspiciously,
then seeing nothing, returns to the Dining-room,
smacking his lips over his meal, as the Curtain
descends for half a minute to indicate the passage of
some hours.*

[*The Curtain Rises a few hours later that night on a
darkened stage. A pale Dawn is seen breaking
through the Windows against which the Shadow of
SHELLEY appears, carrying a Lantern. A Door opens
on Left and MARY creeps out with a Candle, and
carrying a small Valise. She looks round cautiously,
then beckons to CLAIRE, who follows her carrying
another Suitcase. As they walk on tiptoe across the
room towards the Door, the one on Right opens, and
FANNY suddenly appears in a Night-gown with
candle.*

FANNY (*calling out*) : Mary !—Jane !—What are
you doing ? . . .

MARY (*whispering back*) : Who's that ? . . . Oh,
Fanny ! . . . What a start you gave me !

FANNY (*frightenedly*) : I heard a noise—and
thought there were Burglars.—Whatever are
you and Jane doing up at this hour ? . . .

CLAIRE : Nothing—nothing at all, my dear.—
We were just going for a little stroll.—We
couldn't sleep—

MARY : Don't be absurd, Claire—you can't
expect Fanny to believe that—she's not such a
fool as you think—

FANNY : You are right, Mary—I know there is something afoot.—And if there's anything I can do to help you, you have only to say?—

CLAIRE (*whispering*) : Come along, Mary—Shelley will be waiting—I mean, we must go at once—if we are to see the Dawn—

FANNY : You don't deceive me, Claire—I *felt* you were going to meet Shelley—and now I know you are fleeing with him—

MARY : Don't say a word, for Heaven's sake, Fanny!—or all will be ruined—

FANNY : Of course I won't—I don't blame you, Mary—I would do the same myself, had I anyone to flee with!—from this awful house and Mamma. . . .

CLAIRE : Sh ! . . . She may hear ! . . . Speak softly ! . . .

[SHELLEY is then seen waving the lantern outside the Window as the sound of a Coach drawing up is heard.

Come, Mary, or we shall be late, and miss the boat at Calais. . . .

FANNY (*pathetically*) : Then you are going across the Channel?—to France and Italy?—Oh ! how I envy you !—if only I could come too ! . . .

MARY : That is impossible, I'm afraid, my dear Fanny—Claire is only coming because she can interpret for us.

CLAIRE : Besides, Mamma will be furious enough when she finds I have flown, without you going as well ! . . .

FANNY (*timidly*) : I know—I must keep it from her as long as possible.—But I fear she will follow you to Dover as soon as she discovers it !—

MARY : Then we must flee at once—before we are stopped.—Good-bye, my dear Fanny—and we will write to you from France—

[*They both embrace FANNY rapidly, then MARY and CLAIRE make for the Door.*

FANNY : Good-bye, Mary—and think of me sometimes—in this living tomb ! . . .

[*As they open the Door, SHELLEY meets them, taking MARY in his arms.*]

SHELLEY : At last you have come ! . . . I have waited all night, and watched until the lightning and the stars pale. . . . At length it is four o'clock ! . . . and the Chaise is here.—

MARY (*nervously*) : Oh ! . . . my dearest Shelley—I cannot believe we shall succeed ! . . . I am so nervous and frightened.—

SHELLEY : There is nothing to fear now I am with you.—We are safe—now you are in my arms—and we can take the road to Dover !—

CLAIRE : Hurry !—hurry !—or the Household may wake—

FANNY : I will quiet them—and watch till you have safely gone.—Good-bye, Shelley—if I never see you again. . . .

SHELLEY : Farewell, my dear Fanny—and write to us in Italy all the doings of Skinner Street.—

MARY : And what Mamma says when she hears we have gone ! . . .

CLAIRE : That will probably be unrepeatable ! . . . Sh ! . . . I hear someone coming. . . . We must fly. . . .

[*They all go out quickly, except FANNY, who shuts the Door behind them, as MRS. GODWIN'S Voice is heard calling from within.*]

VOICE OF MRS. GODWIN : Fanny ! . . . Fanny ! . . . Where are you ? . . . What are you doing up at this hour ? . . .

FANNY : Coming, Mamma. . . . I was only seeing the house was properly shut. . . .

[*The Chaise is heard departing outside.*]

VOICE OF MRS. GODWIN : What were those voices and footsteps I heard ? . . .

FANNY : Only people outside, Mamma.—A Post-Chaise has just passed—

VOICE OF MRS. GODWIN (*severely*) : Then come to bed at once, Fanny !

FANNY (*obediently*) : Coming, Mamma. . . .

[She goes to the Window to take a last peep, sighs deeply, then crosses swiftly to Door on Right, blowing out the Candle as she goes, and the sound of the Horses and Wheels of the Chaise are heard fading away in the distance, as FANNY goes out crying softly to herself as she

CURTAIN DESCENDS.

ACT THREE

SCENE II

THE SALON AT DEJEAN'S HÔTEL
DE L'ANGLETERRE, SÉCHERON,
SUISSE. MAY 15TH, 1816

CLAIRE is seated in the Salon reading Italian, spelling out the words to herself, as she sips coffee. The sound of Horses' hoofs and a Coach is heard approaching. The INNKEEPER enters, crosses room fussily, goes to Front Door Centre Back, throwing it open as FLETCHER, the Valet, enters, staggering under heavy luggage, followed by POLIDORI, the Italian Physician, a young handsome Anglo-Italian, with a melancholy air, and lastly BYRON himself, travel-stained, but picturesque and debonair, in hat and cloak. CLAIRE leaps up from her seat in delighted amazement, and goes forward to greet him rapturously.

CLAIRE : Byron ! . . . At last ! . . . I thought you would never come . . . how thankful I am to see you !

BYRON (*irritably*) : My dear girl ! . . . I've come as fast as my cumbersome coach and these perfidious roads allowed ! . . .

CLAIRE (*with relief*) : Thank Heavens you have arrived safely ! . . . with all the footpads and dangers on the way.

BYRON (*cynically*) : Unfortunately we had no excitements to relieve the monotony of the journey.—But allow me to present you to my entourage—Gaetano Polidori, my physician,

who speaks English and Italian equally badly—Fletcher, my Valet—who robs me whenever I'm not looking—and finally my menagerie of dogs, cats, birds, etc., not to mention a peacock or two, all of whom cost me more than a growing family put together !

[*As he speaks* BYRON'S two MENSERVANTS enter through Front Door, leading and carrying various Animals across the room to Door on Right. The LANDLORD approaches BYRON, quill, ink, and Visitor's Book in hand, bowing slightly.

LANDLORD : If you will be kind enough to sign your name, sir, our Servants will attend to your baggage.

BYRON (*sarcastically*) : I don't observe it.—As far as I can see *my* Servants are making excellent porters for *your* hotel !

LANDLORD (*perturbed*) : Oh, sir, you mistake—we provide every convenience—

BYRON : Except baths, I am told—but of course you Foreigners don't wash like we English—it's our chief Religion—as far as I can see—

LANDLORD (*expostulating*) : But, sir, there is constant water from the mountains—

BYRON (*mockingly*) : Ice-cold, as I thought.—How could you drag me to such a place, Claire ? . . .

CLAIRE : You know you chose it yourself—in London—when we last met. . . .

LANDLORD (*fawningly*) : Meanwhile, sir, if you would be good enough to register your name, address, and age, among our illustrious Patrons ?—

BYRON (*raising his monocle to Book*) : Illustrious patrons !—I see no name I ever heard of here—except—ah ! yes, that scribbling friend of Miss Clairmont's, Mr. Shelley—a mere versifier—
(*Winking at CLAIRE.*)

LANDLORD (*confidentially*) : Exactly, sir—and he

has not paid his bill.—But this is a mere formality, I assure you, sir.

BYRON : Formality !—I call it a damned intimacy—of the most impertinent kind.—But I suppose I may as well acknowledge myself, otherwise you will think I am an Impostor when someone else informs you that I am here——

[He takes the pen and Visitors' Book, and writes with a flourish.]

“George Gordon, Lord Byron, of no fixed abode”—age?—one hundred years old !

LANDLORD (*excitedly*) : The great Lord Byron ! . . . One hundred years old ! . . . But, milord, you look so young ! . . . It cannot be true !

CLAIRE : Byron !—You must not be so frivolous—or you will have the whole Canton in an uproar !

BYRON : I can't help that—we're as old as we feel—and I feel a hundred at least, I assure you. (*Waving the LANDLORD away.*) Remove my baggage out of my sight, and bring me food and wine immediately.

LANDLORD : At once, milord.—I fly to obey your command.——

[They all go out, as the LANDLORD claps his hands and waves them away, except POLIDORI, who conceals himself behind the open front door, listening.]

CLAIRE looks round nervously, then runs into BYRON's arms.

BYRON (*amusedly*) : Ah ! . . . I wondered how long you would be able to remain aloof ? . . . Well ? . . . And how is my little Claire ? . . .

CLAIRE : Resurrected !—now you have come into her orbit again.——

BYRON (*teasingly*) : I wonder you did not succumb to Writer's cramp, after all your scribblings to me en route ? . . .

CLAIRE : Don't be so cruel, Byron.—You should

be ashamed to call yourself a poet, and be such a poor correspondent !

BYRON (*disengaging himself from her embrace*) : My dear child, my letters are for posterity, not for hysterical young women.

CLAIRE (*poutingly*) : I only wrote from Paris to tell you I had arrived so far, accompanied by the whole tribe of Otaheite philosophers !—

BYRON (*inquisitively*) : And where are they, I should like to know ? . . . When am I to have the pleasure of meeting this vegetarian gang, and the chief cabbage of them all—Shelley ? . . .

CLAIRE : Now at any moment,—but they are not expecting you,—as I was discretion itself, and never betrayed our meetings in London or our Rendezvous here.

BYRON (*tauntingly*) : For once you have been more sensible than you appear— You little fiend !—I can't think why I tolerate you at all, after all the embarrassment you cause me ? . . .

CLAIRE (*fatalistically*) : Because you can't help yourself—any more than I can.—We were meant to meet—and to be intimate—as you and Shelley were meant to meet—here—beneath the roof of the world. . . .

[*She runs to the Windows, drawing the Curtains, and they look out on to the Mountains and Lake.*]

BYRON (*softening*) : You're a little witch to have enticed me to this paradise.—You know I can never resist a fine Landscape—

CLAIRE (*alluringly*) : Or a beautiful woman ? . . .

BYRON (*tilting up her chin*) : We shall see. . . .

[*Sound of Footsteps approaching and the Figures of SHELLEY and MARY are seen through the Windows*]

CLAIRE : Be careful ! . . . Here they come. . . .

BYRON (*looking out in surprise*) : Is that him. . . . That tall stooping, bedraggled figure ? . . . He looks more like a broken-down cab-horse than a poet !—And who is the tall, severe-looking girl beside him ?

CLAIRE : My step-sister Mary—I always told you she was a Blue-stockings—not your type at all.
BYRON : I should think not !—but let us go and meet them.

[*They go towards the Front Door, where they come upon POLIDORI eavesdropping.*

BYRON (*taken aback*) : Polidori !—I thought you had gone upstairs with the baggage ? . . . What are you still doing down here ?

• POLIDORI (*blandly*) : Your biography, sir ! . . . You forget I am your Boswell ! . . .

BYRON : Ah yes ! . . . You are right.—Was it 450 pounds Murray promised you for the manuscript ?

POLIDORI : Five hundred, sir.

BYRON : It's enough. . . . I thought you would make it worth your while to come with me !

[*Meanwhile SHELLEY and MARY come in through the doorway, carrying books, papers, MSS., etc. They stop astonished, at seeing BYRON, while SHELLEY drops everything on to the floor.*

CLAIRE (*running up to them excitedly*) Shelley ! . . . Mary ! . . . I have a surprise for you—we have a Visitor, as you see—Lord Byron himself, in flesh and blood !

SHELLEY (*coming forward with outstretched hands*) : Lord Byron ! . . . Say rather ' Childe Harold '—or ' The Pilgrim ' ! . . . Sir, this is indeed a surprise !—and an honour. . . .

BYRON (*greeting him cordially*) : No more of a surprise than for me to see the author of ' Queen Mab ', and the daughter of William Godwin, in this outlandish place.—

[BYRON turns to MARY, bowing politely over her hand.

MARY : Sir, we have read and admired each succeeding canto of ' Childe Harold ', but we never dreamed of meeting his famous creator in these remote parts, as you say.

SHELLEY (*puzzled*) : Why, may I ask, have you honoured this forgotten corner with your presence ?

BYRON (*frankly*) : Because—like yourselves, possibly—I have come to escape from the calumny and persecution of my family and acquaintances at home. (*Turning to POLIDORI*) Allow me to present Gaetano Polidori, my tame physician, who ministers to me when I have exceeded my usual diet ! . . .

POLIDORI (*in broken English*) : Pleased to meet you, Donna Godwin—or Donna Shelley—should I say ? . . . Your sister—Senorina Clara, has already made us most welcome.

MARY (*surprised*) : Claire ? . . . but I had no knowledge that she knew Lord Byron at all—you never told me, Claire ? . . .

BYRON (*interrupting quickly*) : Er—er—Miss Clairmont and I met quite by chance in London—er—er—before I left for the Continent.

SHELLEY (*looking at CLAIRE narrowly*) : I see—possibly that explains her impatience to reach the Continent likewise ? . . .

CLAIRE (*nervously*) : I was about to tell them that the Hotel is vile, the food expensive, and the beds intolerable.—

BYRON : Yes—Miss Clairmont was regaling us with all the local scandal and gossip—about the inhabitants, etc.

SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : They are the worst plague and offence imaginable.—One could tolerate the animal discomforts, were it not for the continual spying and impertinence of the English visitors, who seem to regard us as curios rather than human beings !

BYRON : Are there no Villas we could rent, where we could enjoy some privacy and peace ?

SHELLEY : There is a Labourer's cottage by the waterside at Coligny—called Maison Mont Algré—which might accommodate us—but

which would be quite unsuitable for you, with your entourage, I fear.

CLAIRE (*enthusiastically*) : But there is the Villa Diodati just above it—where Milton once stayed,—with a fine garden, and a view of the Jura just beyond it.

BYRON (*wearily*) : That sounds more suitable—Anything to escape those mocking, prying crowds at Geneva, with their gossips and calumnies, which nearly drove me mad.—Have you any unconventional High-brows here ?

MARY : There is Madame de Staël at the Château de Coppet—but I understand even *they* look through their Telescopes at us !

BYRON (*determinedly*) : Oh, I will stop all that when I see her again.—She has wit and intellect, but rather an overpowering flow of words.—She once told me Napoleon was less a Man than a System—and that *I* made a mistake in declaring war on the world ! . . .

SHELLEY (*sadly*) : I suppose because *she* did so and failed—people are so easily discomfited.

[BYRON *smilingly* agrees, then changes the conversation.

BYRON : I trust there are no Shops here ?—

MARY (*grimacing*) : Very few.—Claire and I are in despair at the state of our Wardrobes !

BYRON (*humorously*) : That is good, as they will have nowhere to exhibit their outrageous Caricatures of Myself and my Friends, as they did at Geneva.—*You* will be among them soon, Shelley, if you are seen on speaking terms with me !

SHELLEY (*modestly*) : Nonsense—I am far too unknown.—They would not be interested in nonentities like me.

POLIDORI (*flatteringly*) : I am not so sure—we all catch reflected glory from Lord Byron—in time !

[*The LANDLORD re-enters with flagons of Swiss wine, which he sets down on a table before BYRON.*

BYRON (*ecstatically*) : Ah, wine ! glorious wine !—Pray join me in a glass, Shelley ?—and drink a toast to our auspicious meeting.

SHELLEY (*apologetically*) : If you will forgive me—I would prefer a cup of tea or coffee—which I find much more conducive to my work.

BYRON (*patronisingly*) : Ah, I forgot we were all Women here—in our tastes, I mean.—Maître, bring Coffee for all.—But what are you working on now, Shelley ? . . . What do you do with yourselves all day in this desert of a place ?

SHELLEY (*dreamily*) : We read and write, walk, and sail on the Lake, while Claire plays her guitar, and sings to us—in a voice that is like a string of pearls—with memories of Voltaire and Rousseau to keep us company. . . .

BYRON (*enthusiastically*) : A grand contrast !—Miss Clairmont must sing to me.—And we must make an expedition round the Lake, to view the original of Rousseau's 'Héloïse'.

SHELLEY : I have been reading "Julie" assiduously, and I long to visit Clarens, and Gibbon's house at Lausanne. . . .

[*The sound of WOMEN VINEDRESSERS, singing in the Fields, floats in through the open Windows.*

BYRON (*looking up*) : What's that ? . . . Who's that braying outside ? . . .

MARY (*going to Window*) : It's the evening song of the Vinedressers—they are all Women—and the theme of their ballads consist of Shepherds, loves, flocks, and the Sons of Kings who fall in love with beautiful Shepherdesses.

BYRON (*cynically, crossing to Window and looking out*) : Very touching, I'm sure.—But somewhat monotonous—and it would keep me awake, I'm afraid.

MARY : But it's sweet to hear them in the still-

ness of evening, when we are enjoying the sight of the setting sun.

SHELLEY (*suddenly getting up*) : Come out in my boat, Byron,—and see it for yourself.—She is lying on the Lake now, and we can go for a sail in this light breeze.

BYRON (*with alacrity*) : Very well—let's go—and I'll sing you an Albanian song myself!—if you will be sentimental, and give me all your attention.

MARY (*encouragingly*) : That we will—and we shall expect a wild Eastern melody, as in 'The Corsair'!

BYRON (*picking up his hat and cloak*) : And you shall have it, by Jove—Don Juan himself could not be more passionate than I shall be.—Come on, Polidori—lead on, Shelley—and if you hear a wail for help, you'll know we're drowning!

[*As BYRON, SHELLEY, and POLIDORI go out through the Front Door towards the Lake, MARY turns on CLAIRE in disgust.*]

MARY (*angrily*) : Claire! . . . What is the meaning of this?—Why did you never tell us of your previous acquaintance with Lord Byron?

CLAIRE (*peevishly*) : Why should I tell you?—You and Shelley were too busy with your own affairs to bother with mine.

MARY (*injuredly*) : How can you be so unjust? . . . When Shelley and I have sheltered you, ever since we first escaped from Skinner Street.—But how did you first make Lord Byron's acquaintance, I should like to know?

CLAIRE (*stubbornly*) : I wrote to him from Lynmouth.—When I was living in that Cottage all alone,—and you had shown me quite plainly you were jealous of Shelley and me. . . .

MARY (*furiously*) : I was nothing of the kind—but how did you ever get in touch with him from there?—

CLAIRE (*brazenly*) : I wrote again when I returned to London this Spring. . . .

MARY (*aghast*) : You wrote again ! . . . What Impertinence ! . . . And for what reason,—may I ask ?——

CLAIRE (*boldly*) : To get a part on the Stage—at Drury Lane, in which he had an interest—under Douglas Kinnaird, with whom he had influence.

MARY (*appalled*) : What audacity !—Fancy you on the stage !—What conceit !—Then you met him—unknown to us—but when—where ?—and how ?——

CLAIRE (*slightly shamefaced*) : Two or three times in his rooms in Hamilton Place—and then in the Country—outside London—just before he left for the Continent.

MARY (*acidly*) : So that is why you prevailed on us to come to Sécheron—I see it all now !—the Wheedlings—the Subterfuges,—the Excuses—that Switzerland would be best for Shelley's health, for *my* Spirits, etc. ! . . . Oh ! the Deceit and Perfidy of it all ! . . . As though you cared for anything or anybody, but your own clandestine affair !——

CLAIRE (*bursting out*) : But, Mary, how can you be so unfeeling and ungenerous ?—You have your Lover.—Why shouldn't I have mine ? . . . You have your Shelley.—Why shouldn't I have my Byron ?——

MARY (*self-righteously*) : Because *we* came together instinctively—automatically—nothing could prevent us.—But you have pestered Byron, and he is still a Married man, with a Child—besides all his affairs with Lady Jersey, Caroline Lamb, and half the Nobility.—

CLAIRE (*retorting*) : That's what makes him so exciting !—And as for Shelley, is he not also married, with a Wife and two Children ?—and a reputation for unconventionality, to say the least of it ?——

MARY (*angrily*) : How dare you malign Shelley, after all he has done for you ? . . .

CLAIRE (*meaningly*) : I would never malign Shelley—I am too devoted to him for that.—But I thought you would prefer me occupying myself with someone else, of whom you could not possibly be jealous—as you have always been of Shelley and me. . . .

MARY (*furiously*) : How can you say such a thing ? . . . Oh, you are insufferable !—incurable !—at times I simply hate you, Claire.—

CLAIRE (*laughing*) : That's what Byron says.—When he's in a temper—and I tease and irritate him—but the next moment he loves me—so what do I care ? . . . But listen ! . . . I hear him singing on the Lake. . . .

[*The sound of BYRON singing an Albanian song of MOORE'S floats in through the Windows.*]

Let's take my guitar, and go and join them—

[*She picks up her guitar which is lying nearby, and makes for the Door, drawing MARY after her.*]

—Come along, Mary, and forget your spleen—Geneva is far too lovely on a Night like this for Morals and such trash !

[*They go out together through the Front Door, CLAIRE drawing MARY along unwillingly. The Room darkens to indicate the passage of time. POLIDORI re-enters, draws back, and looks out cynically through the Windows as BYRON'S voice floats in from the Lake chanting "There be none of Beauty's daughters with a magic like thee", and CLAIRE'S voice singing the next line.—POLIDORI smiles sarcastically as He closes the Window, and mutters to himself.*]

POLIDORI (*complainingly*) : Now I know why Milord has chosen this wretched Hotel, with its moth-eaten furniture, disgusting food, vile wine, and unsleepable beds !—What is it about these Godwin women that hoodwinks all these men ? . . . Or is it because they are poets and

Gods? . . . But their sly old Father, William, must have tampered there a thing or two, in between his philosophy and 'Political Justice'.—I never did trust philosophers or politicians! . . .

[*As He matters to himself the LANDLORD comes in with a taper, which stores up POLIDORI in its mantle.*]

LANDLORD: Ah, sir, will you wait up for Milord, or will you retire to bed?

POLIDORI, *exultingly*: Retire, most certainly. . . . Otherwise I might be up all night!—and very 'de trop' too, as well! . . .

LANDLORD, *smilingly*: From all I hear of Milord's habits at Geneva, sir, I should say that is most likely!

[*They go out through Inner Door together, the LANDLORD leading the way with his taper. The Curtain drops to indicate the passage of time. It rises again after a few seconds, at Early Dawn Three Months later. An old GARDENER is knocking loudly on the Outer Door. The Inner Door on Right opens and SHELLEY comes into room, half undressed in a dressing-gown, rubbing his eyes sleepily. He crosses to Front Door, opens it, and admits the GARDENER.*]

SHELLEY, *irritably*: Who are you?—What do you want at this hour?—What is it, my good man?—

GARDENER (*holding up a Lady's shoe in his hand*): A shoe, Signor!—I found it in the garden at the Villa Diodati.~ I was about to take it to the Mayor, when I was told it might belong to one of the Ladies of your household?—

[*SHELLEY takes the Shoe from him curiously, looks at it a moment disconcerted, then recognises it, and puts it in his pocket.*]

SHELLEY (*embarrassedly*): Oh . . . thank you . . . yes . . . there is no need to take it to the Mayor.—I expect I can find a home for it here—or somewhere nearby.—Thank you.—Adio.

[He puts his hand in his pocket for a tip, but finds nothing.]

GARDENER (*disappointedly*) : Adio, Signore.——

[The GARDENER goes out ruefully. As SHELLEY takes the Slipper out of his pocket again, CLAIRE is seen creeping in surreptitiously through a Window, dressed in white, like a phantom. SHELLEY, seeing her, cries out suddenly.]

SHELLEY (*amazed*) : Claire ! . . .

• *[She starts, taken aback, on the Window ledge.]*

CLAIRE (*surprised*) : Shelley ! . . .

SHELLEY (*astonished*) : Claire ! . . . Where have you been ? . . . What are you doing out at this hour of the morning ? . . .

[CLAIRE recovers herself, jumps lightly down from the Window, and comes towards SHELLEY.]

CLAIRE (*meaningly*) : Are you really as stupid as that, Shelley ? . . . Do you honestly need to ask where I have been ? . . . I never dreamt I had deceived you so well—— !

SHELLEY (*nervously*) : But, Claire, it is so unwise . . . so imprudent. . . . Anyone may have seen you coming. . . . You know they all watch the Villa Diodati through Telescopes !——

CLAIRE : And see a White Phantom occasionally flitting across the garden—or sailing in the boat on the Lake.—Is there anything so imprudent in that ? . . . You know they believe it is Haunted—or if not, Byron merely says it is his Dogs !

SHELLEY : Then he has more sense than you—and more idea of decency !

CLAIRE (*heatedly*) : Decency !—You dare to talk to me of Sense and Decency ? . . . You, the author of ‘ Queen Mab ’ ?—the Poet of Free Love and Emancipation ? . . . Pah ! . . . You make me sick ! . . . I often thought you a Mad-man, but never a Hypocrite !——

SHELLEY (*soothingly*) : But Claire, I am only thinking of *you*—and your reputation. . . .

CLAIRE (*wildly*) : Reputation ! . . . What do I

care about that? . . . I lost it long ago, when I associated with you and Mary.

SHELLEY (*hurt*) : Claire ! . . . How can you be so cruel? . . . after all we have tried to do for you.

CLAIRE (*abandonedly*) : A fig for you and everybody else ! . . . What do I care for any of you?—when the great Lord Byron loves me ! . . .

SHELLEY (*sorrowfully*) : Oh, Claire ! . . . Claire ! . . . How can you be so foolish?—so insane.—When you know he is a slave to the most violent and vulgar passions, and as mad and unstable as the winds?—

CLAIRE (*resentfully*) : No madder than you, Shelley—and no more unstable.—In any case, it's too late for you to moralise now;—I've sown the seed—and I must bear the fruit—

SHELLEY (*horrified*) : You don't mean?—You can't mean?—that the worst has occurred?—So soon?—In the last few weeks?—

CLAIRE (*desperately*) : I am sure of it—I told Byron tonight—We had a dreadful scene.—He threatened to send the Child when It's born to Mrs. Leigh, his half-sister, to be brought up with her Bastards.—But I extorted a promise from him, that whatever It's sex, It should remain with him—or with me—until It was seven.—

SHELLEY (*shrilly*) : But you cannot bear it out here—with him—and us—it's impossible !

CLAIRE (*proudly*) : That is what he says—but I don't see why not? . . . I'm not ashamed of what I've done.—

SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : No, you wouldn't be.—But he is, I trust.—Besides, what would Polidori say?—and Madame de Staël?—Tom Moore—and all the rest? . . . We must make arrangements to leave here at once—that is the only solution.

[As they are speaking BYRON appears in the Doorway, negligently dressed, in a Dressing-gown over

his Nankeen Trousers and open-necked Shirt. He comes in nonchalantly, as they turn round in surprise. He is carrying a feminine garment in his hand.

BYRON (*blandly*) : I entirely agree with you, Shelley.—The sooner Claire is removed from here the better.—I can't have her leaving evidence like this behind her at my Villa—for my friends Hobhouse, Monk Lewis, and Scrope Davies to see !——

• [*He holds up a Night-gown of CLAIRE's in disgust.—CLAIRE looks horror-stricken, while SHELLEY smiles sadly.*

SHELLEY (*gently*) : Why are you so careless, Claire, dear ? . . . You really should be more careful with your possessions.

CLAIRE (*defending herself*) : But they wouldn't know it was mine—it might be anybody's !——

BYRON (*coldly*) : There are not so many lovely Ladies at Sécheron who wear negligées like this, my dear.

CLAIRE (*flashing out*) : Well, if it wasn't mine, it would be somebody else's, I'm sure ! . . .

BYRON (*cuttingly*) : That is a matter for *me* to decide—not you, my dear.—Meanwhile, I must ask you, Claire, to be a trifle less reckless in your movements, and to remember that we are in telescopic range of the De Staël's Villa, and others besides. . . .

SHELLEY (*sadly*) : I have already warned her of that, Byron, but she pays no heed.—

CLAIRE (*passionately*) : I wish we were in range of a cannon ball to blow us all to pieces !—with all your witticisms and epigrams !—and not an ounce of feeling between either of you ! . . .

[*With that she rushes past them into her Bedroom through Door on Left, bursting into tears hysterically and slamming the door behind her. BYRON shrugs his shoulders, tosses the night-gown after her, and lights a cheroot.*

SHELLEY (*looking after her*) : Poor child . . . she

is terribly distraught.—Can't you be a little more lenient with her, Byron?—

BYRON (*smoking imperturbably*) : I am never lenient with fools.—I cannot, like St. Paul, suffer them gladly, however wise I may feel.—She has had her fun, and now she must pay for it—like everyone else in this world.

SHELLEY (*pointedly*) : And what about you? . . . Will you not have to pay, too?

BYRON (*coolly*) : No—not yet, anyway.—For you see I am still on the credit side—I have got such a big account owing me against life, for this (*pointing to his maimed foot*) and all I have endured with my Wife and our Child—that it has a lot to give me, before I cry 'quits'.

SHELLEY (*anxiously*) : But what about Claire? . . . Who is going to look after her and this child? . . .

BYRON (*shrugging his shoulders*) : That is for you and Mary to say.—She is under your roof now, and is entitled to your protection.

SHELLEY (*hotly*) : On the contrary, to *yours*—in these circumstances—especially as she hasn't a penny piece of her own in the world—

BYRON (*firmly*) : I'm sorry, Shelley, but you can appreciate that if I began providing for every infatuated young Female who crossed my path, I would rapidly become bankrupt!

SHELLEY (*sarcastically*) : I can well believe it—from all I hear of your life.—And I find Knight Errantry somewhat expensive myself!

BYRON (*casually*) : A most ruinous indulgence, I assure you—as I have found to my cost.—But why don't you write more, Shelley? Try to make a living by your pen. . . . Now, if you tried to write in *this* vein it might pay you, and you might have some success in Blackwood's and The Examiner.—What do you think of this?—describing what we saw at Clarens the other day—

[He draws a chair up to the table in Centre, and SHELLEY leans over to him as he begins reading from a manuscript which BYRON pulls out of his pocket, reciting ecstatically.]

BYRON : Clarens, sweet Clarens, birthplace of deep love !

Thine air is the young breath of passionate thought ;

Thy trees take root in Love ; . . .

SHELLEY : Byron ! It's marvellous ! . . . you may be a Devil—or a Madman—but you are a Poet above all else. . . .

[The Curtain descends slowly as the two POETS become engrossed in studying BYRON's poetry.]

C U R T A I N .

ACT THREE

SCENE III

THE PARLOUR OF THE SHELLEY'S
ROOMS AT NO. 12 NEW BOND STREET,
BATH, OCTOBER 1816

[*A Sunday Evening, with the Light fading. CLAIRE is seen at the Piano on Right, Playing and Singing a wistful Song. ELISE FOGGERTY, the Maid, comes in with a Taper to light the candles on the Piano.*

ELISE (*fussily*) : But, Mademoiselle Claire, you cannot see in this light ! . . . Let me light the Candles for you——

CLAIRE (*wearily*) : I can see well enough, Elise.—What is your Mistress Mary doing ?——

ELISE : She is putting Master William to bed, Mademoiselle.—He wanted to wait up for Monsieur Shelley, but Madam thought it was too late.

CLAIRE (*vaguely*) : What time is it, Elise ? . . . I have lost count playing here——

ELISE : After Eight, Mademoiselle—and you should not strain your eyes in this light.—You would not like the Little One which is coming to be short-sighted—now would you ?

CLAIRE (*dreamily*) : It will have Blue Eyes—like His—and as Bright as the Lake of Geneva——

ELISE (*philosophically*) : C'est toujours la même.—We always think that—until the Little One comes.—And then it has eyes like everybody else !

CLAIRE (*coldly*) : That will do, Elise.—You had better go and help Madame with Master William.

ELISE (*shrugging her shoulders*) : Very well, Mademoiselle.

[ELISE goes out Centre Back, as MARY enters, carrying an Easel and Paints.

MARY (*to ELISE in Doorway*) : Master William is safely tucked up in bed, Elise, but keep an eye on him, as I want to work.

ELISE : Very good, Madame.—(*Aside.*) And this was to be my Evening out ! . . . (*She flounces out in a bad temper.*)

MARY (*laughingly*) : He has unmercifully thrown two Dogs about—fortunately made of strong china !—Otherwise there would certainly be broken bones in the case !

CLAIRE (*without looking up*) : As to his Night-gowns, Elise and I have puzzled and puzzled over them, haven't we, Elise ? . . .

MARY (*aside*) : She's gone out in a huff !—

CLAIRE (*continuing unmoved*) : And to use Albé's language—mused and coddled without effect—

ELISE (*through Doorway*) : Bien sûr, Mdlle, mais il ne fait rien ! . . .

MARY (*enquiringly*) : No sign of Monsieur, Elise ?—

ELISE (*shaking her head*) : Non, Madame.—But he is always late, as we know !—And he may have been delayed on the road.

MARY (*anxiously*) : That is true.—But I am anxious all the same.—Light the Tapers in his Room, and put his Night-clothes before the Fire, to warm them for his return.—

ELISE (*meaningly*) : Very good, Madame.—If he *does* return tonight.—But perhaps he has been detained by Mdlle Fanny. . . .

MARY : That may be.—But in that case I think he will bring her with him.—

ELISE (*proudly*) : I have Middle Fanny's Room all prepared for her if she comes, Madame.

MARY : That is good, Elise—and brew some more Tea.—They will want it if they are late——

ELISE : Very good, Madame.

[ELISE goes out, smiling knowingly.]

CLAIRE (*casually*) : Do you think Fanny will return with Shelley?—Or go to Aunt Everina's in Dublin?

MARY (*uncertainly*) : I don't know.—But I'm afraid they mayn't have her after all.—I am rather anxious, since that last depressing letter from her——

CLAIRE (*getting up from piano*) : So am I.—But what did she say? . . . I can't remember exactly——

[MARY takes the Letter out of her Bodice, and reads aloud.]

MARY (*reading*) : She says "The dreadful state of her Mind keeps her Body in a Fever."—But what is it all about?—"That she can't stand Skinner Street any longer, with Mamma talking scandal about us, and Papa continually pestered by Creditors while he is writing!" . . .

CLAIRE (*dubiously*) : Poor Mamma has never forgiven me for eloping with you and Shelley to Calais last year! . . .

MARY (*heatedly*) : But that is no reason why she should pursue us like a Hound after Foxes! . . .

CLAIRE (*tremulously*) : What would she say if she knew of my present condition! . . .

MARY (*consolingly*) : There is no fear of that,—for we have been very discreet, as you know,—and they think you are here to look after William.

CLAIRE (*anxiously*) : But what are we going to do after the Child is born? . . .

MARY (*cheerfully*) : Call you Mrs. Clairmont, as we do now,—until the Child is weaned,—

and then move to Marlow, or elsewhere, and say it is a Friend's Infant sent to us in the Country, which you are looking after——

CLAIRE (*hopefully*) : And by that time Albé will have made some provision for it and for me, no doubt——

MARY (*flippantly*) : He will have to do something, surely.—Otherwise Shelley will be Fathering all our Children ! . . .

CLAIRE (*shocked*) : Mary ! . . . How can you be so coarse about your own Step-Sister and your would-be Husband ! . . .

MARY (*frankly*) : It is not coarseness, Claire, but Honesty.—And you may as well know what people are saying about us already ! . . .

CLAIRE (*wryly*) : I know only too well.—Elise takes care to tell me ! . . .

MARY (*shrewdly*) : Elise is a Gossip, and not to be trusted.—Fanny was right, when she warned us to be careful with the Servants—and have only Foreign ones.

CLAIRE (*wisely*) : I am not so sure about Foreigners.—They are often too intelligent.—And undoubtedly Elise can read our Letters without much difficulty.

MARY (*severely*) : You and Shelley are so careless leaving them lying about.—I beg of you to be careful with any from Albé——

CLAIRE (*bitterly*) : You needn't worry—as He never writes—so there is nothing to leave about ! . . .

MARY (*sympathetically*) : That is discreet of him in a way—altho' it is hard for you, my dear.—*(Sound of Horses' hoofs without.)* Ah ! . . . I hear the Postchaise at last. . . . *(She runs to the Window, C. Back, drawing the Curtains.)* Perhaps Shelley will be on it. . . . Yes.—There He is getting down ! . . . Thank Heavens . . . safe and sound ! . . . at last ! . . .

CLAIRE (*joining MARY at the Window*) : But no

Fanny ! . . . What can have happened ? . . .
I trust nothing is wrong ! . . .

MARY (*mystified*) : He must have left her at Bristol.—But I can't think why——

CLAIRE (*gloomily*) : I hope it is all right. . . .
But I've had horrible Presentiments all day. . . .

MARY (*admittingly*) : So have I—until I saw Shelley.—But here he is, and my Forebodings were wrong, no doubt——

[*Sound of Footsteps approaching, at which MARY rushes to Door, Back, to open it, as SHELLEY comes in, in Travelling Coat. She falls back as she sees his ashen Face.*]

MARY (*amazed*) : Shelley ! . . . Whatever is the matter ? . . . What on earth has happened ? . . .

SHELLEY (*faintly, clutching his Head*) : Have you some hot Tea ? . . . I must have something quickly—at once——

[*He comes forward unsteadily, sinking into the first Chair to hand.*]

MARY (*quickly*) : Of course.—I told Elise specially to brew some. . . .

CLAIRE (*tactfully*) : I'll go and get it at once——

[*She goes out rapidly through Side-Door, while MARY strokes SHELLEY's Head.*]

MARY (*anxiously*) : But why are you in this state, my dear ? . . . Where is Fanny ? . . . Did not you find her ? . . . What has happened, Percy ? . . .

SHELLEY (*brokenly*) : Yes—I found her—at the Mackworth Arms Inn at Swansea.—(*He takes a Letter out of his pocket.*) This was found with a Bottle of Laudanum on the table beside her. . . .

[*MARY takes the Note from his shaking Hand, with trembling fingers herself.*]

MARY (*reading in a dazed Voice*) : “ I have long determined that the best thing I could do was to put an end to the existence of a Being whose Birth was unfortunate. . . . ”

[MARY turns to SHELLEY in tears, crumpling the note in her hands.

MARY (*desperately*) : Oh ! Shelley ! . . . This is terrible ! . . . I can't read more ! . . . It's too horrible for words ! . . . I can't bear it ! . . . Whatever made her do such a terrible thing ? . . .

SHELLEY (*wearily*) : I don't know . . . she must have been desperate . . . they forced open the door, and we found her lying on her bed, her long brown hair round her face, and the little Genevan watch we gave her, and a few shillings in her purse——

[CLAIRE has been standing in the doorway with a dish of tea during SHELLEY's words, and drops it as he finishes.

CLAIRE (*coming forward hysterically*) : How horrible ! . . . And to think that my Babe may feel unwanted like that one day ! . . .

MARY (*putting her arms round CLAIRE consolingly*) : No ! . . . No ! . . . Claire ! . . . You must not say things like that ! . . . Fanny was always wanted—by my Mother who adored her,—when she was living with Imlay, her Father——

SHELLEY (*interjecting*) : And by us, who would always have given her a Home if she had come to us——

CLAIRE (*fiercely*) : It was Papa and Mamma who were to blame !—They always made her feel she was unwanted !—Papa—with his endless debts, and Mamma—with her malicious, spiteful tongue !——

SHELLEY (*pathetically*) : You are right, Claire. —But now *they* say I am to blame !——

MARY (*dazed*) : How ? . . . What ? . . . I don't understand. . . .

SHELLEY (*wretchedly*) : That it was *I* she was in love with !—That it was because of *me* she killed herself !——

MARY (*distraught*) : But that's impossible !——

You scarcely ever saw Fanny.—How could that be? . . . I never heard anything so absurd in the whole of my life! . . .

CLAIRE (*slowly to herself*): I am not so sure.—Fanny always asked particularly after Shelley in her Letters.—And of course he saw her quite recently in London, when he was arranging about Albé's Third Canto of "Childe Harold."

SHELLEY (*exonerating himself*): But I had no idea she was in such a desperate state as this!—She certainly complained of the Godwins,—but I have never known any Family who did not complain of each other!—

CLAIRE (*acidly*): Certainly not ours!—We are all too intricately connected—what with different Fathers and Mothers!—and yet the same strain in all of us—

MARY (*morbidly*): A Suicidal strain, I fear—judging by my poor Mother—who tried to do the same as Fanny—over Putney Bridge—

SHELLEY (*bitterly*): I am not surprised, living with that cold Fiend of a Godwin!—Who is so busy writing Lives of the Seventeenth Century, such as his new "Mandeville", that he has not time to notice the Lives which are going on round him! . . .

MARY (*sarcastically*): Only in so far as they affect his purse.—Have you sent him the £300 you promised him, through Longhill, the Publisher?—

SHELLEY (*grudgingly*): I sent him as much as I could.—But we had saved only £248 for ourselves—as my Father has taken care to tie up everything possible, as you know,—and Longhill has supported him in this.

MARY (*morosely*): Then poor Papa will be unable to finish his Novel—and with this news of Fanny on top of it! . . .

CLAIRE (*cynically*): You will be accused of depriving the World of a great and grievous

loss, no doubt!—as poor Fanny always took care to inform us!—

MARY (*anxiously*): But what are they doing about her? . . . What arrangements are they making? . . .

SHELLEY (*disgustedly*): Godwin arrived just before I left Swansea—and spoke in the most callous and hypocritical manner—which sickened me. . . .

CLAIRE (*curiously*): How do you mean? . . . What did he say? . . .

SHELLEY (*dejectedly*): They are trying to fasten the responsibility for it all on me—

MARY (*angrily*): On you! . . . But that's impossible! . . . Unjust! . . . Untrue! . . . They couldn't do anything so outrageous! . . .

SHELLEY (*cryptically*): Nothing is impossible in a Household like the Godwins, my dear!

CLAIRE (*wryly*): If only you could have been in love with us all Three at the same time, Shelley!—Fanny, Mary, myself! . . .

MARY (*flippanly*): Even your Universal Affection could not embrace as widely as that, could it, Shelley? . . .

SHELLEY (*firmly*): Assuredly not.—You know how devoted I am to you, Claire—and was to poor Fanny.—But Mary and I are the Two who are really made for each other, as we have always known.—Haven't we, Mary? . . .

MARY (*rapturously*): Yes, Shelley, always . . . from the very beginning. . . .

CLAIRE (*tartly*): To say nothing of Harriet, who is still your Wife in Law, after all—I suppose—

SHELLEY (*admittingly*): True.—But I have had no word from her for the last six weeks,—although I have written to Hookham for news, hoping he may know something—

CLAIRE (*rising and yawning*): Well, I am weary,

so I shall leave you two Love-Birds together.—And if I disturb you again, it will only be in my Sleep as I have done before !—But I will try not to allow my Pillow to walk into the middle of the Room, as it has done other Nights ! . . . Good night, Shelley.—Good night, Mary—and thank Heaven you have got each other at least . . . whatever the rest of us lack. . . .

[She lights a Taper, and goes out Left, as they murmur ' Good night ' after her.] •

SHELLEY (*pitiingly*) : Poor Claire !—She has only dreams of Albé for a Bedfellow.—Singing and Sailing on the Lake at Sécheron—

MARY (*warmly*) : Never a word from him !—And the Babe due any day now !—But, my poor Darling—what a day you've had,—Drink some tea to refresh your poor tired self.

[She pours out a Cup from the Tray which CLAIRE has set down, handing it to SHELLEY, who sips it slowly, as she strokes his Forehead.]

SHELLEY (*closing his eyes with relief*) : Mary—when I see you, and feel your cool, kind fingers on my brow,—I am invigorated again. . . .

MARY (*caressing him tenderly*) : Oh, my dear ! If only we *could* find a House away from all these troubles !—a House with a lawn,—near a River or Lake, noble Trees or divine Mountains—that should be our little Mouse-hole to retire to !—

SHELLEY (*longingly*) : Ah ! . . . Were I indeed a winged Elf, and could soar over Mountains and Seas, and pounce on the little Spot.—But where shall I find it, my sweet Mary ? . . . not in Bath, amid all these Chimney pots ! . . . for a certe ! . . .

MARY (*eagerly*) : Never mind that.—Give me a garden,—and absentia Claire,—and I will thank you for anything—

SHELLEY (*quizzically*) : Why are you always jealous of poor Claire ? . . . She has enough

troubles of her own without *you* adding to them ! . . .

MARY (*unkindly*) : She should be content to leave us happily together—not to continually make the Third at our Feast——

SHELLEY (*generously*) : Poor Girl !—She has nowhere else to go.—And she would not be “*de trop*” if only Albé would make the Fourth,—as he did at Sécheron——

MARY (*dubiously*) : Do you think he ever will again ? . . . She has heard nothing from him since we returned—for weeks, now ! . . .

SHELLEY (*thoughtfully*) : I don’t know.—He is a curious creature—sometimes Angel—sometimes Devil—in a Human frame which is simultancously beautiful and repulsive——

MARY (*disapprovingly*) : He is an exceedingly interesting person,—but he is a slave to the violent and most vulgar prejudices,—and as mad as the winds !——

SHELLEY (*cynically*) : He certainly is that.—But remember he is a Poet, which is a Synonym for Madness,—in England—at any rate !

MARY (*shrewdly*) : You are right.—But I should hate to be in love with him—although it is less dangerous than her being in love with you !——

SHELLEY (*surprised*) : What are you suggesting ? . . . You would not have her follow in poor Fanny’s footsteps, would you ? . . .

MARY (*possessively*) : Heaven forbid ! . . . Never ! . . . Never ! . . . But I would have her remember that you are *my* Lover and no one else’s—although not yet my Husband ! . . .

SHELLEY (*irritated*) : Don’t talk like that, Mary.—I feel tied and manacled when you speak so.—Perhaps one day I shall make you respectable—but until then——

[*As He is speaking, the Front Door Bell suddenly Rings.*]

Whoever can that be at this hour of night ? . . .

MARY (*rising agitatedly*) : It must be something urgent !——

[ELISE *appears through Inner Door on Right to answer it.*

(*Quickly.*) See who it is, Elise—and show them in if it's important——

ELISE : Very good, Madame.

[*She goes out through Front Door, and is seen talking to a MESSENGER through Doorway in Outer Hall.*

SHELLEY (*anxiously*) : I expect it is more instructions from Godwin—concerning poor Fanny——

MARY (*tremblingly*) : I trust it is nothing worse.—But I have a horrible Foreboding.—I have shivered all evening. . . .

[*Elise returns with a Letter in her hand.*

ELISE : It is a Special Courier, Monsieur—with a Letter from Mr. Hookham, which he says I am to give you without delay.

SHELLEY (*surprised*) : Hookham !—I have been expecting to hear from him for nearly a month—about Harriet and the Children—I wonder why he is in such a hurry now?

[*He takes the Letter from ELISE quickly. MARY watches him anxiously as he slits it open with a knife. His face changes colour as he reads, every drop of blood draining from his cheeks.*

MARY (*anxiously*) : Shelley ! . . . What is it ? . . . Whatever has happened ? . . . You look like a Ghost ! . . . Why are you so pale ? . . . Has anything befallen Harriet and the Children ? . . .

[*SHELLEY lets the Letter drop limply from his Fingers. MARY stoops to pick it up, tremblingly.*

SHELLEY (*whispering in a strangled voice*) : Read it for yourself. . . . I am too faint to read further. . . .

[*He sinks back in a Chair, half fainting.*

MARY (*reading*) : 'While I was yet endeavouring to discover Mrs. Shelley's address, informa-

tion was brought to me that she was dead. . . .
Oh, Shelley ! . . . My Dearest ! . . .

SHELLEY (*faintly*) : Read on.—There is worse to come.—“The wheel has come full circle——”

MARY (*reading rapidly*) : ‘That she had destroyed herself.—I was informed that she was taken from the Serpentine River on Tuesday last. . . . She was called Harriet Smith, and the Verdict was “found drowned.”’—(*Wildly.*) But, Shelley ! . . . This is too horrible—too terrible for words ! . . . Harriet drowned ! . . . Dead in the Serpentine ! . . . I can’t believe it. . . . I can’t. . . . It’s impossible ! . . .

SHELLEY (*desperately*) : If only it were !—But I fear it is true.—Hookham is not the man to fabricate such a Story.—And Harriet often talked of suicide—even when I first knew her—at Mrs. Fenning’s Academy.—She used to ask my opinion of it—and discuss it at length with Hogg at York—and with Strangers at a Dinner Party !—

MARY (*amazed*) : But why should she have chosen to do it now ? . . . She had her children with her.—You had made all provision possible for her.—And she had her Father and her Sister Eliza—— ?

SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : Ah ! . . . *She* may well have been the Cause—she was a Devil in the form of a Woman—as I knew well from the Months she lived with us in York, Ireland, and Wales. . . .

MARY (*consolingly*) : But Papa has maintained for a long time that Harriet was Unfaithful to you with a Major Ryan—even previous to our Elopement last year ?—

SHELLEY (*firmly*) : However that may be—the fact remains that she has died—a dark and dreadful death—I must go to London at once, Mary, and learn precisely what occurred. . . .

Then I must retrieve my Children, and bring them back to us safely here.

MARY (*warmly*) : You know I will be a real Mother to them, Shelley—and little William shall be helped third to them at table, which will do him a world of good !—(*anxiously*) But, Shelley, you cannot go *now*?—It is far too late—and there is no means of conveyance, unless you walk !——

SHELLEY (*rising impetuously*) : I would leap over the Hills themselves, if I could reach London by daybreak——

MARY (*soothingly*) : But you cannot, my sweet Elf.—Rest here tonight—then start by Pack-Horse tomorrow at dawn——

SHELLEY (*giving in*) : You are right, Mary—you are always right.—What would I do without you? . . . And now at last we can have the consolation of Legalising our Union—(*taking her in his arms*) and I the exquisite joy of making you my Wife. . . .

MARY (*ecstatically*) : Oh, my Best Love ! . . . To you I owe every joy, every perfection that I enjoy and boast of. . . . Love me, Sweet, forever.—I hardly know what I mean, I am so agitated !

SHELLEY (*tenderly*) : Come to bed, my dearest, where I will come with you and comfort you—as I have done so many times before—and will do so many times again——

[*He leads her towards the Door with his arm round her shoulders, blowing out the Candles, as the*

CURTAIN FALLS QUICKLY.

ACT FOUR

SCENE I

THE PARLOUR OF THE GODWINS'
HOUSE IN SKINNER STREET,
DECEMBER 30TH, 1816

The Dining Table is laid ready for the Wedding Breakfast. MRS. GODWIN is fussing round it with her Maid, MARIA, setting the chairs, and seeing everything is in order.

MRS. GODWIN (*fussily*) : Have you got everything in order, Maria?—This is a very auspicious occasion, don't forget, and Mr. Godwin will be very vexed if everything is not quite correct.

MARIA (*bobbing*) : The places are all set, Ma'am, and the Pigeon Pie and Apple Tart are in the oven.

MRS. GODWIN (*anxiously*) : And the Pastries are not burnt, I trust?

MARIA (*sentimentally*) : No, Ma'am, they and the Cookies are all brown and crisp,—as Miss Mary used to like them, when she was at home,—bless her heart.

MRS. GODWIN (*severely*) : She is Mrs.—not Miss—any longer—or rather she *will* be after the service at St. Mildred's this afternoon. Is Mr. Godwin dressed yet?

MARIA : He was tying his cravat when I left him, Ma'am, so he should be down at any moment now.

[Sound of footsteps outside, Door on Left opens,

GODWIN *enters, dressed for the Wedding ceremony, in full regalia.*

MRS. GODWIN (*proudly*) : Ah, there you are, William, in full trim, looking like a Turkey-cock at a Christmas feast !

GODWIN (*retorting*) : You look in pretty fine plumage yourself, my dear. But I trust it is going to be a full-feathered Parade and not a Cock-fight—as it generally is between you and Shelley and Mary.—Have they arrived yet ?

MRS. GODWIN : Not yet—they were spending the night with the Leigh Hunts at Hampstead, so they may be late.—In any case, have you ever known Shelley on time for anything ?——

GODWIN (*cynically*) : He would be late for his own Funeral—let alone his Wedding—and I shouldn't wonder if he was late at his own Birth !—I must ask his Mother, Lady Shelley, one of these days.

MRS. GODWIN (*anxiously*) : Don't be coarse with her, William !—Remember she is a "*Lady*."—What relation will she be to us now ?—let me see ?——

GODWIN (*tersely*) : None to you, as you are not Mary's Mother—merely a Collateral to you—but of course an 'In-law' to me.

MRS. GODWIN (*patronisingly*) : Yes, it must be an experience for you for one of your own Children to attach herself to the fringe of the Peerage.

GODWIN (*pompously*) : Baronetage, you mean.—Percy is the eldest son of Sir Timothy Shelley of Field Place, Horsham, in the County of Sussex, Baronet.

MRS. GODWIN (*snobbishly*) : So that according to the vulgar ideas of the world—as you would say—it is a good match !

GODWIN (*self-satisfied*) : Yes, one might say so—and I have great hopes the Young Man will make her a good Husband—despite their precipitate elopement more than two years ago.

MRS. GODWIN (*complainingly*) : I wouldn't object so much to Shelley if he had been content to elope only with *your* daughter—but to abduct my child Jane as well was more than I could stomach.

GODWIN (*sarcastically*) : Well, if you *will* produce such progeny !—By the bye, have you heard of her activities lately ?—

MRS. GODWIN (*sniffily*) : No, but I understand she is still a member of their irregular household—which poor Fanny contemplated joining. . . .

GODWIN (*frowning*) : Don't speak of *her* now—we want no ghosts at the marriage feast. . . .

MRS. GODWIN (*lugubriously*) : They will be here all the time, nevertheless—Poor Fanny—who killed herself with laudanum at Swansea, for love of Shelley—and Harriet, who threw herself in the Serpentine but two months ago—

GODWIN (*suggestively*) : For love of Major Ryan, they say—

MRS. GODWIN (*dolefully*) : Fanny—Harriet—and Charles—who I hear is making love to a French girl at Bagnère,—in between his indigestion, and learning Spanish !

[*Sounds of opening and shutting of Doors, Voices, and Footsteps, approaching.*]

MR. GODWIN (*softly*) : Shh ! . . . here they come.—I heard the front door opening.

[*MARIA opens the door, C. Back, for SHELLEY and MARY, who walk in, arm-in-arm.*]

MARIA (*loudly*) : Mr. and Mrs. Percy Shelley !

MRS. GODWIN (*effusively*) : Don't be premature, Maria. (*Going forward to kiss MARY.*) How are you, Mary, my dear ? . . . It seems a lifetime since I saw you.—And how is the dear babe William ?—We are proud you have called him after your famous Father !— (*MARY returns her embrace perfunctorily.*)

GODWIN (*coldly*) : How are you, Shelley ? . . . It is a change to see you face to face at last,

after all our correspondence during the last year.

SHELLEY (*aloofly*) : I imagine we have said more on paper than we would have done verbally, sir.

GODWIN (*thawing slightly*) : I trust, however, we will now find a more satisfactory solution to our pecuniary arrangements.

SHELLEY (*cautiously*) : I trust so—but I fear my affairs are not as satisfactory as they might be.

GODWIN (*turning to MARY*) : In any case, it is a great satisfaction to Mrs. Godwin and myself to welcome you and Mary here on this memorable occasion.

MARY (*flippantly*) : I feel I should look like the prodigal daughter who returns to the fold ! . . .

MRS. GODWIN (*patronisingly*) : Certainly not—you are now the Grand Lady—or very nearly,—and we look forward to the day when we can introduce our friends—such as the Lambs and the Baxters—to Lady Shelley.

SHELLEY (*coldly*) : I don't think Charles Lamb would have much use for such nonsense—judging by what little I have seen of him.—

MRS. GODWIN (*fussily*) : Come and sit down and have some Breakfast, to sustain you for the “magical” ceremony in store.—

MARY (*frigidly*) : And in any case, my future father-in-law, Sir Timothy, is in the best of health, I understand.

MRS. GODWIN (*knowingly*) : And long may he remain so, my dear, but these Winters are very trying ! . . .

[*They all seat themselves round the table, MARIA waiting on them.*]

SHELLEY (*frankly*) : Not that he is likely to let us know when he is failing—

MRS. GODWIN (*passing the dishes*) : Nobody ever does.—But won't you have any meat, Shelley ? . . . Very body-building, I assure you.

SHELLEY (*passing the Dish on*) : But not Verse-making—no, thank you, only vegetables, as usual.

GODWIN (*inquisitively*) : But Sir Timothy makes you an adequate allowance of £2000 a year now, does he not?—

SHELLEY (*bitterly*) : On condition that I relinquish all rights to the rest of the fortune and estates.—

GODWIN (*callously*) : Which no doubt you have wisely done?—

SHELLEY (*sadly*) : Out of necessity—not wisdom—and I fear it was somewhat unfair on my Children—and Harriet's—

MRS. GODWIN (*solicitously*) : What arrangements are you making about them? . . . poor motherless little darlings! . . .

MARY (*firmly*) : Shelley and I hope to gain possession of them, and to give them a permanent Home with us.

SHELLEY (*anxiously*) : *If* we can obtain permission from the Chancery.—But the Westbrookes are making trouble, and claiming them also, and I fear there may be a bitter fight to obtain them.

MARY (*passionately*) : But they are your's, Shelley—your own Children—flesh of your flesh—bone of your bone—nothing can ever alter that.

MRS. GODWIN (*irritatingly*) : Harriet might have had something to say about that—after all, she *was* their Mother.

MARY (*tartly*) : But Shelley was their Father, and I don't see what rights anyone else has to them?—

GODWIN (*coldly*) : But the Law thinks otherwise, I presume.—And I understand from Longdill and your Solicitors, that you may have an acrimonious business to recover them.

SHELLEY (*stubbornly*) : I fear so—but I will

fight for them to my last breath—however unsuitable and immoral a parent they contend that I am !

MARY (*hotly*) : Due principally to *your* doctrines, Papa, and for nursing us on ‘ Political Justice ’——

GODWIN (*loftily*) : That was merely a philosophic treatise, and not meant to be put into practice in my own home.

MARY : Then you should not have reared *us* on it, Papa.—Poor Claire has suffered for it already.——

MRS. GODWIN (*anxiously*) : Poor Claire ! . . . *Jane*, do you mean ? . . . Is she ill ? . . . I thought she was happily looking after little William in your absence ?—(SHELLEY *looks meaningly at MARY.*)

SHELLEY (*uncomfortably*) : So she is.—Mary only means that the Philosopher’s doctrines are so ingrained in her that she is somewhat head-strong and self-willed.

MRS. GODWIN (*bitterly*) : She was always that from the day she was born, and refused to be nursed by me.—For some reason she never responded to my Mother-love——

GODWIN (*sadly*) : Poor Jane—she has a passionate rather than affectionate nature, which is not open to correction——

SHELLEY : You are right—no capacity for friendship or family feeling, but much for intrigue and infatuation, I fear——

[MARIA *re-enters with a note for SHELLEY.*

MARIA (*breathlessly*) : Excuse me, sir, but this was just brought for you by post-chaise.—They said it was urgent, and to be delivered into your hands immediately.

[SHELLEY *takes the letter from her, trembling with agitation.*

SHELLEY : Thank you, Maria——

[*He opens it, as MARY leans over his shoulder, reading it.*

MRS. GODWIN (*anxiously*) : What is it? . . . Anything serious? . . .

MR. GODWIN (*perturbed*) : I trust nothing is wrong? . . .

SHELLEY (*reading agitatedly*) : No—nothing—it is from Claire,—about William—saying that he is well—and that she dreamt last night that he had a small companion called Allegra—a beautiful Child, with blue eyes and fair hair, who cooed and cried, and whom he loved very much—

MRS. GODWIN (*interrupting*) : That is what he needs of course, poor child.—Mary, you must be unselfish, and give him just such a little companion.

MARY (*confused*) : I think he has quite enough already—judging from Claire's letter—or rather, I mean, he will have, when we recover Shelley's Children, Charles and Ianthe.—But we must return this evening to help Claire look after him.—So let us away to the Church without delay—

MRS. GODWIN (*stupidly*) : Yes indeed—what time is it, Shelley?—I never know the hour—

SHELLEY (*restively*) : I haven't the least idea, but high time we were there, I am sure.

GODWIN (*raising his glass*) : Before we go we must drink your's and Mary's health in a glass of wine, Shelley.

MRS. GODWIN : Certainly—certainly—a toast ! —a toast !—

[*They all raise their glasses, clicking them together.*

GODWIN (*rising pompously*) : To Percy and Mary Shelley !—May they have a long and industrious married life together, bringing forth much fruit, both of their physical and intellectual union, and add new lustre and respectability to their illustrious name !

[*They all drink deeply, smiling at each other.*

SHELLEY (*aside*) : What a toast ! . . . To respectability ! . . .

MRS. GODWIN (*picking up her skirts*) : Mary and I will preen ourselves, and meet you here in a few moments.

[*She sweeps out through the Door, Right, followed reluctantly by MARY.*

GODWIN (*going towards Door on Left*) : While I will unearth my most recent accounts and debts to show you, Shelley, so you may see what a good business man you have for a father-in-law.

SHELLEY (*sarcastically*) : I don't doubt it, sir ; your constant financial communications have left me no room for that !——

[*GODWIN goes out, Left, into his room, leaving SHELLEY alone. He picks up a copy of 'Political Justice' and begins reading half-aloud to himself as MARIA returns through main Door, C. Back.*

MARIA (*agitatedly*) : Mr. Shelley, there is a Lady asking for you outside, who says it is most urgent that she should see you at once. . . . May I show her in ?

SHELLEY (*surprised, putting down Book*) : A lady wanting to see me ?—Whoever can it be ?—What sort of a lady ?—Whom did she say she was ?——

MARIA : She wouldn't give her name, sir ; but she's a very handsome Lady—and says she must see you at once, on very important business—privately.

SHELLEY (*aside to himself*) : Privately—who on earth can it be ?—Perhaps it is something to do with Claire.—Show her in then, Maria,—and leave us alone together.

MARIA (*curtseying*) : Very well, sir——

[*She goes out, while SHELLEY replaces the Book and runs his fingers through his long hair, returning in a moment with a MYSTERIOUS LADY, heavily*

veiled. MARIA looks inquisitively at her, then goes out again, at a nod from SHELLEY, who turns to the LADY.

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*timidly advancing*) : Mr. Shelley ? . . .

SHELLEY (*bowing*) : Madam—what can I do for you ?—and whom have I the honour of addressing ?

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*shyly*) : For the moment I would prefer to remain unknown—until our acquaintance has ripened further,—as I trust it may.

SHELLEY (*pleadingly*) : Will you not even remove your veil ?—so that I may have the pleasure—if not the knowledge—of seeing to whom I speak ?—

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*nervously*) : My features, unfortunately, are sufficiently well known in London to necessitate precautions, but as they are quite unknown to you, I will therefore unveil—

[She lifts the veil, revealing a strikingly beautiful face, at which SHELLEY cannot help gasping with surprised delight.

SHELLEY (*astonished*) : Madam—for what reason have I the privilege,—like Paris,—of looking on such a Helen ?—

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*frankly*) : Because I have long planned to make your acquaintance, Mr. Shelley.—For months I have read ‘Queen Mab’ day and night, and determined to meet the author of those brilliant, enlightening sentiments—and now that I see him—I am not disappointed—

SHELLEY (*outspokenly*) : But, Madam, what useful purpose, may I ask, can be served by this mutual admiration society ?—if I may call it such ?—I am a poet, whose business it is to write poetry for the benefit of mankind, not to suffer idle flatterers.—

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*hurt and offended*) : Your words wound me, Mr. Shelley,—but do not be hard and callous.—I have come to throw myself on your mercy and consideration—I did not think the author of ‘Queen Mab’ would treat me so.—

SHELLEY (*taken aback*) : Madam, what can I say to you?—I am at your service, as I am always at that of a beautiful woman—

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*humbly*) : Do not be so impersonal, Mr. Shelley, despite your ‘universal’ love.—For I have come—having thought and dreamt of you by day and night—to lay my name, my fortune, my very life beneath your feet—so tread softly, and don’t kill it underfoot. . . .

SHELLEY (*at a loss*) : But, Madam, for what do I deserve this admiration and devotion?—For writing a few verses, with whose ideals and aspirations you agree?—

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*passionately*) : No—more—more—far more than that—for being to me the revelation of life itself,—so that I would renounce my husband, my family, home, friends, fame, and fortune, to follow you throughout the world—

SHELLEY (*humorously and sensibly*) : Barefoot—I suppose?—but it would be very bleak, I assure you!—And touched as I am by this devotion, have you not realised I am a married man?—with a Wife and Children?—

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*tactlessly*) : I know—I know.—But I understood that Mrs. Shelley had died in the most tragic circumstance,—and your children were now Wards in Chancery?

SHELLEY (*pained*) : Alas!—that is all too true.—But meanwhile I am bound to an individual by every chain of mental and spiritual affinity, and our lives are about to be linked together legally by the Church and State.

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*devotedly*) : No matter.—Can

I not be your disciple even so? Remember there was Martha as well as Mary—and I would only serve and wait.—

SHELLEY (*amused*): I fear that is impossible. I cannot—like Lord Byron—commence a Seraglio to transport from place to place!—not having the means or ability to do so—and I am leaving England almost immediately.

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*beseechingly*): Then let me come with you?—that is why I ventured to intrude on you this evening.—I heard you were about to return abroad, and I summoned sufficient courage to approach you before you went, to grant me a reprieve for Life—or—

SHELLEY (*firmly*): Madam—I cannot tell you how it grieves me to pain you so—but although I am a Poet, I strive not to be a Fool—and to follow your suggestion would be pure foolishness—not to say infamy—

[Sounds of voices and footsteps approaching.]

SHELLEY (*hurriedly*): My friends are now approaching, so I beg you to go, and leave me at once.—

MYSTERIOUS LADY (*rising quickly, and putting out a hand, which SHELLEY takes reluctantly*): Very well.—But this is not farewell—we shall meet again.—In Italy, perhaps, when you are older—and more sympathetic?—

[As she goes towards the door, C. Back, MARY and MRS. GODWIN re-enter through Door Right. She turns for one look at MARY, who does not see her, then goes.]

MARY (*coming towards SHELLEY apologetically*): Ah! there you are, Shelley, I am afraid we have been prinking longer than I intended—I trust we are not late for the Service?—

MRS. GODWIN (*facetiously*): The Bride should always keep her Groom waiting—it is good training for him as a Husband!

MARY (*questioningly*): Maria said you had a

caller—a Lady visitor—is that so?—What did she want?—

SHELLEY (*confused*) : Oh . . . only a message from Claire—in connection with the Child—

MRS. GODWIN (*inquisitively*) : Nothing wrong, I hope?—

SHELLEY (*meaningly to MARY*) : Oh no, nothing at all—William is thriving, and she has great joy looking after him.

MRS. GODWIN (*sighing*) : What a pity she cannot be comfortably married and have respectable Children of her own.—An Infant would do much to calm down her excitable spirits.

MARY (*smiling to herself*) : It would indeed, as we have lately discovered—I mean, since she has tended little William.

[MR. GODWIN *returns through Door Left, with his arms full of Manuscripts and papers.*

GODWIN (*eagerly*) : Here is the manuscript of “Mandeville,” Shelley, which I trust will settle this sheaf of debts in time. But meanwhile, I should be much obliged if you would investigate my outstanding creditors for me?—

[*He hands SHELLEY a sheaf of Bills, as the Grandfather Clock strikes eleven.*

MARY (*pushing him gently aside*) : Not now, Father—or we shall be late for the Service, and remember this is the first time I have ever been married!—in the ecclesiastical sense I mean,—so I don’t want to miss a moment of it!—

GODWIN (*agreeably*) : You are right, my dear.—Shelley and I can get down to business when we return from Church.—Meanwhile, let’s away, and may the bells of St. Mildred’s ring in a prosperous new life to us all!—

[*He opens the door for MARY, kissing her perfunctorily on the forehead as She passes him, then patting SHELLEY on the shoulder with a patronising air. The Church Bells are heard pealing in the distance through the open Door.*

MRS. GODWIN (*coming up to SHELLEY*) : And I must give the dear Boy one Motherly embrace—to wish him Good Luck !

SHELLEY (*drawing back*) : Madam—I always maintain—with the Philosopher—that embracing is a most insanitary practice—between Strangers or Friends !—

MARY (*calling back through the door*) : But not Lovers.—Come along, Shelley, or we shall miss the Stage Coach back to Bath this afternoon.—

[SHELLEY quickly joins her outside, MRS. GODWIN flouncing out after him.]

MRS. GODWIN (*to GODWIN*) : And that is a Bridegroom on his Wedding day !—You may be a Philosopher, William, but you were certainly a better Groom !—

GODWIN (*following her out*) : You seem to forget, my dear, that they have been technically ‘ married ’ for more than two years !—

MRS. GODWIN (*tartly*) : Then he should have learnt to be a better husband by this time !

[MARIA curtsies as They each go past the Windows, shutting the Door after them, and shaking her head, as She starts clearing up the Wedding Breakfast, muttering to herself.]

MARIA (*aloud to herself*) : What a cold fish he is, to have all those Ladies so dotty about him !—too anæmic for my liking—with his vegetarian diet and water drinking ! . . . Give me a full-blooded man, says I, who likes his meat victuals, and his tankard of ale and glass of wine !—and a Wench, like me, when he sees one !—

[The Curtain falls as She bustles round the table, clearing up the dishes, still muttering to herself.]

CURTAIN.

ACT FOUR

SCENE II

LORD BYRON'S VILLA AT LA MIRA,
ITALY, SUMMER, 1819

LA GUICCIOLI, *a lovely young Italian Countess, is kneeling at a Prie-Dieu Centre Back in the Salon, counting her Rosary, as a Church Bell rings without, and BYRON enters through Door Right, with a large Mastiff, Moretto, at his heels.*

BYRON: What? my lovely Teresa—on your knees again?—we'll make a Nun of you before long if you continue these oblations! (*To Mastiff.*) Down, Moretto, down, sir!

[*The COUNTESS rises quickly, putting her arms passionately round BYRON.*

LA GUICCIOLI (*flatteringly*): Oh, mio Biron, I was only beguiling the time until you returned to me.—Religion is a great consolation at such times, my dearest. . . .

BYRON (*cynically*): So it seems—such a consolation, in fact, that I sometimes contemplate entering the Catholic Church myself—only there are too many Priests, Candles, Incense, and Smells!

LA GUICCIOLI (*suspiciously*): What have you been consoling yourself with then, my dear?—Some more of the Women your Gondolieri have picked up in the streets and canals?—

BYRON (*severely*): Certainly not—you know I left them behind me in Venice—with the extravagances of my youth.—Besides, they smell too much of garlic—even the Countesses!

LA GUICCIOLI (*offendedly*) : Oh, mio Biron, would you add insult to all the rest I have suffered and endured for your sake ?

BYRON (*taking her in his arms again*) : My little Teresa—Amor mio—You know I do not recognise *you* as one of them—even though your old fool of a Husband is a Count.—And you smell at all times intoxicatingly of herbs and sweet aroma. . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*effusively*) : Amor mio, I love you more than life itself—am I not ready to give up a vast fortune for you ?—have I not told my Husband so ?

BYRON (*annoyed*) : What ? . . . You have not been so indiscreet ?—I thought you had told him you required a change of air, and that you were going to Garda or Como for your health ?

LA GUICCIOLI (*lightly*) : I wrote to him at Ravenna that I was spitting blood, and had seen the famous Dr. Aglietti in Venice, who recommended no special remedies for my malady beyond a change of air.—And as I was sure his work would not permit him to come with me here, Lord Byron had offered to accompany me as he was dissatisfied with Venice at this hot season !

BYRON (*anxiously*) : I trust you added that I craved his permission,—and awaited it with the greatest solicitude ?

LA GUICCIOLI (*lightly*) : But, of course—that is a *sine qua non*—I also added a postscript that I had not left the house in Venice, except to see his Children.

BYRON (*cautiously*) : You did not mention the arrival of *my* Child Allegra here ? . . .

LA GUICCIOLI : No—I thought it as well not to appear too domesticated—even if she is obviously the result of a previous liaison on your part—and too grown up to be any of *our* production !

BYRON (*tauntingly*) : Poor little thing—I believe you are quite jealous at not having Mothered her? . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*seriously*) : She is so adorable that I almost am—although when I see how you treat her Mother, I swear you shall never do the same to me !

BYRON (*epigrammatically*) : Mistresses should produce passion—not Children. They can leave that to Wives—and Mothers—Claire made a slip, and she must pay for it.

LA GUICCIOLI (*archly*) : But what about Husbands and Fathers?

BYRON (*shrugging his shoulders*) : They are a necessary evil, which we poor lovers must endure !—

[*Sounds of a Child's dancing footsteps and Voice outside.*

ALLEGRA (*without*) : No, Elise, I *will* play with the monkey !—It is Papa's—and therefore it is mine !

[ALLEGRA *dances in, pulling a small Monkey after her, ELISE, the Swiss Maid, follows behind, wringing her hands, and trying to keep the Child in order.*

ELISE (*anxiously*) : Be careful, be careful, Senorina Allegra, or it may bite you, and then whatever would your poor Mama—Madame Claire—say? . . .

ALLEGRA (*pertly*) : Mama does not matter—I am with Papa now !

[*She dances up to BYRON, kissing his hand.*

Look, Papa, I am teaching him to dance with me !—He can almost do the tango !—Isn't that clever for a monkey? . . .

ELISE (*pulling ALLEGRA back*) : Come away, Senorina, you are disturbing Milord !

BYRON (*irritably*) : Let her alone, Elise—she is doing nothing of the kind—and she is enjoying it, even if the Monkey is not !—But for goodness

sake don't mention her Mother in my hearing—or in the Child's.

ELISE (*looking frightened*) : Bien, Monsieur.

BYRON (*meaningly*) : La Contessa Guiccioli is Senorina Allegra's nominal Mother for the time being—do you understand ?

ELISE : Si, Signore.

ALLEGRA (*ingenuously*) : But, Papa, how often do I change my Mothers?—will you tell me?—

BYRON (*amused*) : As often as I tell you, mio bambino.

LA GUICCIOLI (*coaxingly*) : But I am your last and permanent Mama, I trust, Allegra.—Come here, Caro, and sit on my lap?—

BYRON (*cynically*) : La Contessa is always an Optimist, my child, but let us hope this time she is a Prophetess as well ! . . .

ALLEGRA (*climbing on LA GUICCIOLI's knee*) : Will you take me for a drive this afternoon, Mama, so that I can wear my new white silk dress?—and see all the People bowing and curtsying as we pass ? . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*proudly*) : Yes, my darling, and you will look like a little Princess sitting beside me,—with your white skin,—among all the dusky little Italian Children.

ALLEGRA (*greedily*) : Then we can go into the Garden after, with Papa, when he comes back from his ride, and eat grapes and plums till our mouths are full ! . . .

BYRON : She is as vain as a little Peacock, and as ravenous as a Vulture !—

[*He is interrupted by a knocking on the Outer Door Left.*]

LA GUICCIOLI (*rising in fear*) : Who can that be ?—My husband, perhaps ? . . .

BYRON (*soothingly*) : No—no—(*To ELISE.*)—See who it is quickly—and admit only Friends.

[ELISE goes to the Door Left, opens it, and before she can stop him, SHELLEY bursts in, travel-stained and dishevelled.

BYRON (*going towards him in surprise*) : Why Shelley ! What a surprise is this !—For what are we indebted to see such a stranger in our midst ?—Why have you honoured us so suddenly ?—without any previous intimation ?—

SHELLEY (*approaching him with outstretched hands*) : My dear Albé ! . . . I was passing near Mira, —having been with the Hoppners at Venice,—and I felt that I must call in to enquire how you—and Allegra—fared ?

BYRON (*turning to ALLEGRA*) : And here you see us.—Allegra, embrace your Friend Shelley.—Is she not the same beautiful child you sent to me a few months ago ?—and just as lively as ever ?—

SHELLEY (*going up to ALLEGRA, and holding her at arm's length*) : How are you, little Ba ? . . . Why yes,—she is still the bluff little Commadore—only grown somewhat—taller and slimmer—and perhaps a trifle paler—

BYRON (*explaining rapidly*) : That was the heat at Venice this summer.—It affected us all—which is the reason for the Contessa accompanying me hither.—Shelley, may I present you to La Contessa Teresa Guiccioli, who has done me the honour of harbouring in my Summer retreat, until she is restored to Health—and her Husband !

SHELLEY : I heard you had *two* Daughters here—one nearly as old as yourself—from my Gondoleiri ! (*Bowing to LA GUICCIOLI politely.*) Madam, I am delighted to meet the Lady of whom I have heard so much, and to whom, I understand, Lord Byron is indebted for his return to health and spirits—after the excesses of Venice. . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*giving SHELLEY her hand graciously*) : And I to meet the Poet, whom Milord assures

me is the least selfish of all mortals, and the most given to good works for his Friends.

SHELLEY (*pointedly*) : But that does not always indicate a good Poet, Madam.—The best writers are often the worst profligates, and vice versa.—But what need of a glow-worm, when we have the Sun in our midst?—(*He bows magnanimously to BYRON.*)

BYRON (*sincerely for once*) : You are right, Shelley—I am a new man, as you see,—living in domestic bliss, with my natural Wife and Child—Working on ‘Don Juan’—and passing the time studiously and idyllically, in this sylvan retreat.

SHELLEY (*surprised*) : If only all the wags in London could see you now, what a disappointment they would have !—But what poor publicity for your famous characteristics !

BYRON : Precisely.—But meanwhile, what can I do for you, Shelley?—apart from discussing Poetry and Philosophy, in which we always indulge—for I know it is useless to offer you meat and drink ?——

SHELLEY (*smilingly*) : Entirely—thank you—I am as anæmic and vegetarian as ever, as you call me !——

BYRON (*confidentially*) : And I am living on Soda-water and Biscuits, for my figure—which is very unconvivial stuff.——

LA GUICCIOLI (*whispering*) : As I have found, Mr. Shelley,—but I console myself with wine and sweetmeats—when Lord Byron is not looking !

BYRON (*over-hearing*) : You little glutton !—But Shelley did not come all the way from Venice to hear about our diet.—What is the real purport, may I ask ?

SHELLEY (*boldly*) : To tell the truth, Albé, I come as a direct Messenger from Claire !

BYRON (*scowling*) : Claire?—I thought I forbade you to mention her name to me? . . .

But I guessed as much !—She has been writing the most insolent letters about Allegra—threatening to abduct her, and saying I am not a fit person to look after her ! . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*innocently*) : Well, are you ?—mio Caro—after all ?—

BYRON (*angrily*) : Teresa ! . . . Remember the Child ! . . . (*To ALLEGRA.*) Now run along, Bambino, before you hear worse.—Take her away, and buy her some more toys, Elise. •

ALLEGRA (*stamping her foot*) : But I don't want any more toys, Papa—I've got plenty—and I just want to be with you !

BYRON (*severely*) : Go at once with Elise—do as you're told, Allegra,—begone !

[ALLEGRA goes out sulkily Left with ELISE.]

See what trouble a man gets by taking care of his natural Children !—Never do it, I warn you, Shelley.

SHELLEY (*sighing*) : I trust I shall not have the opportunity—although I have had enough trouble already with my legitimate ones !—

LA GUICCIOLI (*scornfully*) : And I determine never to inflict myself with any—of whatever kind !—

SHELLEY (*seriously*) : But seriously, Albé, you don't realise what a desperate state Claire is in at not seeing Allegra ! . . . When she first sent her to you, you promised she might have free access to the Child, from time to time ?—

BYRON (*grudgingly*) : And so she may—under proper restrictions.—But she is not to throw everything into confusion by her Bedlam behaviour.

SHELLEY (*desperately*) : You do not realise the frenzied state she is in—absurd and foolish it may be,—but she is unhappy and in bad health—and the weak and the foolish are in this respect like Kings—they can do no wrong.—

BYRON (*firmly*) : A poor reason for Kingship—and she can do much harm to me—and the

Child.—I absolutely refuse to see her.—I have had enough of hysterical, foolish women in my time.—I will have no more.

LA GUICCIOLI (*mockingly*) : I see I must take care in future never to have these feminine defects !—Perhaps you would prefer me to doff my skirts, and get into breeches at once, would you, Milord ?

BYRON : Certainly not.—You are much more charming as you are—and also—— No, I will not say that——

LA GUICCIOLI (*curiously*) : Say what ? . . . What were you about to say ? . . . Don't keep us in suspense like this for some sally, mio Biron.

BYRON : I was going to say—Because then they would have some excuse for the perverse and unnatural accusations they hurl against me ! . . .

SHELLEY (*complainingly*) : But at least you might keep Claire conversant with the state of Allegra's health and well-being ?—She had heard nothing for months, and was naturally desperately anxious.

BYRON (*sourly*) : I will give my Secretary, Zambelli, orders to write regularly each month about the Child.

SHELLEY (*pleadingly*) : That will be a great consolation. . . . But meanwhile, we wondered if you would not allow Allegra to come to us for a short time at Padua ?—where Mary now is with our Children ?——

BYRON (*bluntly*) : If I may say so, Shelley, without offence, the thought of my child being reared with your's, on a starvation diet of vegetables and green fruit, and taught to believe there is no Deity, fills me with alarm.

SHELLEY : I assure you she would have the most constant and devoted attention from Cla—I mean from Mary, and myself——

BYRON (*loftily*) : It is not a question of attention and care—but of morals and principles.—But

if you are anxious, Allegra shall go to Padua for a week or so—in fact, I have no legal right over the Child.—If Claire likes to take it, let her have it. I do not say—as most people would—that I refuse to provide for it—but she must surely be aware herself how very imprudent such a measure would be.

SHELLEY (*frankly*) : She is aware of it—and it is because of the advantages you can offer the Child—with your money and position—that Claire ever consented to send Allegra to you. But she now regrets it bitterly, poor thing, and is inconsolable till she sees her again.

BYRON (*shrewdly*) : But she will be as unwilling to part with her again as she is to be absent from her now,—and there will only be a second renewal of affliction and partings—of which I am sick to death !

SHELLEY (*subtly*) : Why could you not give Claire the means to support Allegra?—so that she would be free and independent, and you would have no more responsibility ?

BYRON (*heatedly*) : But that is precisely what I will not do.—My other child Ada has been torn from me by her Mother.—I will not relinquish my rights on my only other progeny.

LA GUICCIOLI (*supporting him*) : Quite right, mio Biron, especially when you have a ready-made Mother here to look after her ! . . .

SHELLEY (*sympathetically*) : I can appreciate your feelings in the matter, Byron,—especially when I have just lost my own two children in Chancery to strangers.

BYRON (*hotly*) : I know, my dear fellow, and had I been there, I would have moved Heaven and earth to have prevented such a monstrous decision ! . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*ingenuously*) : It is absurd to think that you are accounted unsuitable to look after your own Children, when you are so good

at looking after other peoples !—Little Allegra is certainly a credit to your upbringing, Mr. Shelley.

SHELLEY (*gratefully*) : I am grateful you should think so, Contessa, and I wish Lord Byron would allow me to continue to do so?—

BYRON (*generously*) : I tell you what I will do—I will lend you my Villa at Este, and there you may have the Child for a short time—

SHELLEY : For how long, Albé—how long?—

BYRON (*haughtily*) : Until I am ready to receive her again.—

SHELLEY (*thankfully*) : I thank you most heartily for your kind offer, and I will inform Mary and Claire at once.—Meanwhile, perhaps you will be good enough to arrange for Allegra and Elise to accompany me in the morning? . . .

BYRON (*imperiously*) : Very well.—But before you leave, we must go for a ride together on the sands, and discuss Poetry and Philosophy—which will inspire you to more songs—such as “Julian and Madallo.”

SHELLEY (*bowing*) : I will call on you tomorrow about noon, when I know you rise.—Buona notte, Contessa ; I trust I may be of service to you at some future date.

LA GUICCIOLI (*giving him her hand to kiss*) : And I to you, Sir. Pray commend me to your Wife, and say how much I would like to make her acquaintance—

BYRON (*interrupting, and taking SHELLEY by the arm*) : So long as you do not meet her sister Claire—for she is a real little spitfire to match yourself !—Good night, Shelley, until tomorrow, and I will order the horses.—

SHELLEY (*gratefully, shaking BYRON'S hand*) : Good night, Albé, and thank you for your surprising kindness to Claire—and Allegra.—

[As SHELLEY goes to the Door Left, opening it, ELISE is seen eavesdropping beside it. . . . She looks at SHELLEY sulkily, as he passes her, then slinks back into the room, as BYRON calls her.

BYRON (*domineeringly*) : Elise, you are to return with Signorina Allegra to Mr. Shelley's household tomorrow—so start packing tonight.

[ELISE *comes forward frenziedly*.

ELISE (*terrifiedly*) : Oh no, milord, not that.—Never can I return there again ! . . .

BYRON (*surprised*) : Why not?—What is the matter?—What are you frightened of?—

ELISE (*bursting into tears*) : Paolo—their manservant.—He loves me, but he will not marry me ! . . .

BYRON (*laughing*) : Is that all ? . . . It seems an infectious complaint in this country !—And especially in Shelley's Household ! . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*aside to Byron*) : At times, my dear George, you are unnecessarily coarse in front of the Servants.

ELISE (*hysterically*) : But it is always the same in Mr. Shelley's House.—They all love.—But they do not marry.—They have children but no Husbands or Wives—or proper Fathers and Mothers !—

BYRON (*severely*) : What do you mean, you impertinent hussey ? . . . Mr. and Mrs. Shelley are properly married, and they have two legitimate Children.—

ELISE (*shrilly*) : But that is not all, Milord—there is another Child at Naples—of Mr. Shelley's and Miss Claire's !—

BYRON (*amazed*) : What ! . . . (*Seizing her by the wrist.*) How dare you make such an accusation ? . . . What do you mean by saying such a thing ? . . .

ELISE (*agitatedly*) : It is true—I swear it is true—Paolo will swear to it as well.—The Child was born at Naples quite recently—when Miss Clairmont was unwell last winter—and placed in the Foundling Hospital there—

BYRON (*throwing her from him*) : That will do—I have heard enough—you may go.—I will

send for you in the morning, when I have made my plans for Signorina Allegra——

[ELISE goes out crestfallen, but palpitating with suppressed excitement.

BYRON (*horrified*) : Shelley and Claire ! . . . No, no, that is too much ! . . . although I always suspected it, from the first time she wrote to me, describing him as the man she really loved, and from whom she had suffered so much——

LA GUICCIOLI (*skittishly*) : He certainly seems to have a fatal fascination ! . . . You will be lucky if he does not exert it on me, mio Biron !

BYRON : If he did ! . . . But you would not be so vulgar as to compete with common Women like Mary and Claire——

LA GUICCIOLI (*coquettishly*) : I hope not, my dear.—But you never know. . . .

BYRON (*patting her*) : No, no, Teresa, you reserve yourself for men of taste—and genius—I trust.

LA GUICCIOLI (*flatteringly*) : Of course, my dear George, otherwise why should I be here ?——

BYRON (*decidedly*) : But this makes me more determined than ever not to allow Allegra to return to her dissolute Mother, and the whole iniquitous Shelley ménage. (*Making up his mind firmly.*) I shall send her to a Convent where none of them can reach her.

LA GUICCIOLI (*questioningly*) : But do you think it is true ? . . . Elise may be fabricating the whole story, for Blackmail and Scandal—which all Servants love.

BYRON (*shrugging his shoulders*) : Possibly.—But we will investigate it with the Hoppners, and from every available source. There is always a grain of truth in every lie.—Besides, it tallies with Shelley's principles of Free Love, and general intercourse. . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*sighing*) : I wish *my* husband could embrace such principles !——

BYRON (*nervously*) : It would certainly ease our situation.—But you don't imagine he suspects us of actually being here together?—do you?

LA GUICCIOLI (*casually*) : I trust not.—But you know the Italian tongue of Rumour!—And the tradesmen and Gondolieri have probably talked.—You see what Shelley said about hearing you had *two* Daughters! . . .

[*Suddenly there is a loud noise Outside, Footsteps, Voices, and Banging of Doors.*

BYRON (*alarmed*) : Whoever can that be—at this hour? . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*rising*) : It sounds like my Husband's voice! . . . But it could not be! . . . He cannot have tracked us here! . . .

[*The COUNT's voice is heard Outside, insisting on admittance.*

COUNT (*loudly*) : Where is La Contessa? . . . Where is milord Byron? . . . I must see them at once.—Take me to them immediately!

BYRON (*whispering*) : But I fear he has! . . .

[*ELISE tries to bar the entrance, but the COUNT pushes past her, and bursts in through the door Left.*

LA GUICCIOLI (*terrifiedly*) : Oh! . . . It is He! . . . It is He! . . . Oh, Le Bon Dieu! . . .

[*She sinks back half-fainting on the Sofa.*

BYRON (*cautiously*) : Sh! . . . Keep calm! . . . Keep calm! . . . Don't lose your head!—

[*The COUNT confronts them in the Doorway.*

COUNT (*hissingly to Teresa*) : So!—I have found you at last! . . . Having been to Venice, Lake Garda, and Como—and every other place where you said you would be!—I have found you at last, in this delectable spot, with Lord Byron himself!—Good-evening, Milord!

[*Bowing superciliously.*

BYRON (*nonchalantly*) : Good-evening, Count Guiccioli.—Won't you sit down?—Make yourself at home—and take a glass of wine with me?

—Had we known of your arrival, we would have made preparations to entertain you fittingly.

COUNT (*sarcastically*) : No doubt—and perhaps not so intimately as this.—But my business is with my Wife, not with you, Milord. Your behaviour is your own concern—but her's is *my* responsibility.

BYRON (*politely*) : In that case I will leave you to have a family conference in private.—

[*Moving towards the Doorway Right, and bowing with relief to the Countess.*]

You have only to send for me if you require me, Contessa.

[*He goes out quickly through inner Door Right.*]

LA GUICCIOLI (*facing her Husband bravely*) : On the contrary, it is *my* concern—I am not a chattel to be ordered about at your convenience !—

COUNT (*severely*) : That is precisely what you are—until you obtain a dispensation from the Pope to the contrary.—And I have made out a categorical Programme, which I intend you shall follow.

LA GUICCIOLI (*curiously*) : And what is the first item, may I ask ?

COUNT (*reading his Programme*) : First, that you do not remain an hour longer under Lord Byron's roof—

LA GUICCIOLI (*desperately*) : That is ridiculous ! —I am here for my health,—as Dr. Aglietti will tell you,—and he recommended this as the *only* place which would agree with me.—

COUNT (*sarcastically*) : Because of the Inhabitants, no doubt.—In that case, Dr. Aglietti will have to change his prescription at once.

LA GUICCIOLI (*hysterically*) : I shall start spitting blood again in a moment—if I am moved.—Ah ! . . . I feel it coming on already—at the very thought ! . . .

COUNT (*callously*) : Then you will have to continue doing so at Ravenna, where you will return with me tomorrow.

LA GUICCIOLI (*determinedly*) : I will do nothing of the kind—I absolutely refuse ! . . .

COUNT (*imperturbably*) : Moreover, you will regulate your habits, and rise at a reasonable hour each morning,—and not at midday, as I understand you do here.

LA GUICCIOLI (*pettishly*) : What tales have you been hearing ?—I will rise at whatever hour it pleases me ! . . .

COUNT (*coolly*) : Further, you will be satisfied with whatever place I choose for you to live in, and accept the furniture and habiliments as they are, and not ask for new ones ! . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*stamping her foot*) : I will do nothing of the kind ! . . . You know how susceptible my health and spirits are to my environment and surroundings ! . . .

COUNT (*unmoved*) : You must invariably be ready to live at Ravenna, to travel and return there with me as occasion demands, and, above all, to be docile in my hands, and to set forth your own views only gently and modestly.

LA GUICCIOLI (*furiously*) : Gently and modestly ! . . . I never heard any conditions so monstrous in my life ! . . . If I return to you at all I must be an entirely free agent, to live where I like, go and come when I will, rise when I please, have my own house and equipment, my own maid and entourage,—receive any visitors at any time of the day—or evening—privately, without interruptions—and have 35 scudi a month for my own personal use !

COUNT (*compromisingly*) : If you will return with me to Ravenna at once—and sever all connections with Lord Byron for the moment—I might *possibly* consider these demands more leniently. . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*irresolutely*) : I must ask Lord Byron's advice first—I can decide nothing without his approval.

[*She goes to the Door Right, calling out to BYRON as she opens it.*

George—George—will you come back at once?—I have something very important to ask you.—

VOICE OF BYRON OFF : Coming, dear lady, immediately.

COUNT (*irritably*) : I should have thought your Husband—not your Lover—was the person to decide such things for you.

LA GUICCIOLI (*cynically*) : Not at all.—Husbands are there to provide subsistence—Lovers to make decisions of importance.

[BYRON *re-enters nonchalantly in his dressing-gown.*

BYRON (*genially*) : Well, my dear Count, I trust you and your beautiful wife have come to agreement?—

COUNT (*sourly*) : On the contrary, we are waiting to come to agreement with you—

BYRON (*mock-modestly*) : With me?—Who am I, to concern myself in marital affairs?—

LA GUICCIOLI (*impatiently*) : George!—Don't pose!—My husband wishes me to return with him to Ravenna, and be a kind of married Nun, as far as I can see—what do you advise?

BYRON (*suavely*) : My dear Contessa—loath as I am to say it—I must advise you to return to your Husband immediately, as any self-respecting Wife would do.—

LA GUICCIOLI (*appalled*) : But you cannot conceive the conditions he has laid down! . . .

BYRON (*meaningly*) : I am sure the Count is far too much a man of the world—and too good a Husband—to expect his Wife to conform to *any* conditions,—except in letter only! . . .

COUNT (*grudgingly admiring him*) : Milord !— I always heard you were a genius— but I never credited it till now !—

BYRON : Of tact and discretion— in other people's lives, perhaps— but seldom in my own, sir, alas !—

COUNT (*shrewdly*) : That is a customary mark of genius, milord—

BYRON (*cynically*) : So they tell me— although I have experienced enough situations to learn to master them—

COUNT (*admiringly*) : If we can achieve that, milord, we are Gods, not men !

LA GUICCIOLI (*bitterly*) : But George, you cannot suggest returning me to my Husband ?— like a “ brown paper parcel,” tied up with string ?— as you English say—

BYRON (*sensibly*) : My dear lady, it is either that— or retiring with you to France,— or the Americas,— changing our names, and leading a dull, provincial life, for which I cannot feel either of us is suited ! . . .

COUNT (*agreeably*) : You are right, Milord.— But you are the first poet I have met who has combined such common sense with sensibility.— As for Teresa, she is, as you no doubt know, romantic by instinct, but prosaic in practice.

LA GUICCIOLI (*resentfully*) : I am nothing of the kind.— But I cannot be romantic all by myself— I must have support from someone !—

[*Bursting into tears.*]

COUNT (*putting his arm round her consolingly*) : Come along, my dear girl, and weep on my shoulder.— Husbands were made for tears— not Lovers.— And if you are lonely, Milord (*turning to BYRON*), come and take up your abode with us at Ravenna— where Teresa's Father, Count Gamba, and myself, would gladly welcome you as her cavaliere servante— under our hospitable eye.

BYRON (*politely*) : I thank you, my dear Count, and when I am satiated with the pleasures of La Mira and Venice, I will assuredly take you at your word, and descend on your Palazzo, complete with my Menagerie of Dogs, Horses, Birds, Monkeys, Parrots, Peacocks, and Child !

COUNT (*generously*) : I assure you, you will be more than welcome, as always.

LA GUICCIOLI (*sarcastically*) : So long as you do not bring any other Wives with you, Milord, as we hear you have sometimes done !—

BYRON : I am becoming somewhat antique for that, and must consider settling down respectably in a Household such as you suggest, Count.

COUNT (*hospitably*) : I am delighted to hear it, milord, and my Father-in-law and myself will do all in our power to make you comfortable and at ease—while Teresa, no doubt, will entertain you, as usual. . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*wryly*) : I will do my poor best to amuse the wit of Europe !

BYRON (*pouring out Wine*) : Then let us drink to the Entente Cordiale of Husbands, Wives,—and Lovers !

[*They each lift their glass to toast each other cynically.*]

COUNT : To Husbands !

LA GUICCIOLI : To Wives !

BYRON : But *not*—to Lovers !

[*They all drink deeply, smiling, knowingly at each other.*]

AS THE CURTAIN DESCENDS.

ACT FOUR

SCENE III

SALON OF SHELLEY'S TORN PALAZZO
DI CHIESA, PISA, SPRING, 1822*

EVENING : MARY is Drawing in the Salon, as there is a tap on the Centre Door, and CLAIRE enters surreptitiously from the Loggia.

MARY (*looking up surprised*) : Claire ! What are you doing here ? . . . I thought you were with Mrs. Mason at Casa Silva ?——

CLAIRE (*agitatedly*) : So I was, but I had to come round to hear if you had any news of Allegra ?——

MARY (*hesitatingly*) : Yes—I am afraid she has been sent to the Convent of Bagnacavallo——

CLAIRE (*desperately*) : Oh Heavens ! . . . and here am I, powerless to do anything except curse and weep.—Because Byron is rich and famous, and I am poor and nothing.

MARY (*consolingly*) : Don't upset yourself, my dear, more than you need—nothing that you can do will be of any avail.

CLAIRE (*wretchedly*) : I know—I know—that is the most terrible part of it.—Every time I see a fire—every time I eat and drink, or get into a warm bed, I think of my poor darling suffering I know not what—cold, hunger, thirst, discomfort of every sort ! . . .

MARY (*sensibly*) : Don't exaggerate, Claire—it's only a Convent, not a penitentiary.

CLAIRE (*bitterly*) : I know what these Convents are in Italy—they are only other names for Prisons !——

MARY (*contradictingly*) : That is untrue, Claire—you are being grossly unfair.

CLAIRE (*cuttingly*) : What about your friend Emilia Viviani at the Convent of St. Anna ? . . . Is that not an example of what I say ?—

MARY (*admittedly*) : Certainly it is a restricted life for a Young Woman—but she does not suffer physical discomfort.

CLAIRE (*ironically*) : Then why does Shelley 'rescue' her so often, and bring her here ?—

MARY (*loyally*) : We enjoy her companionship—and he says she inspires him.—He has gone to fetch her this evening.

CLAIRE (*sarcastically*) : Indeed—he seems to spend his days going to and fro from St. Anna's.

MARY (*doggedly*) : It gives him exercise—and teaches her English.

CLAIRE (*meaningly*) : Amongst other things, no doubt.

MARY (*turning on her*) : What do you mean ? . . .

CLAIRE (*taken aback*) : Nothing—only—have you read "Epipsychidion" ?

MARY : No—what's that ?—

CLAIRE (*scornfully*) : A Symposium, in the style of Dante.—And I suppose he must have someone to inspire such things !—

MARY (*mildly*) : You mean Emilia ?—And he is sorry for the girl cooped up in that Convent—no doubt.

CLAIRE (*distractedly*) : I know—suffocatingly hot in summer, and freezingly cold in winter !—

MARY (*guardedly*) : I wish her family would look after her—but they sent her there purposely—

CLAIRE (*cattishly*) : To be out of mischief, I suppose—and look at the trouble she's causing here already !

MARY (*matter-of-factly*) : I think her Father and Step-Mother want her out of the way until she is married—to some rich old man.

CLAIRE (*anxiously*) : What unnatural parents—if only I had my precious Allegra here—haven't you really any more news from Bagnacavello ? . . .

MARY : Not a word.—Shelley has been besieging Byron with questions—but you know what he is.—He may come here this evening—then perhaps we shall hear something.

CLAIRE (*irritably*) : In which case I must disappear, I suppose—and take refuge with Mrs. Mason again at Casa Silva.

MARY (*warningly*) : It would be more discreet—otherwise, Byron will refuse to enter.

CLAIRE (*petulantly*) : But why has he this absurd aversion to seeing me, Mary ?—

MARY : I think it is a kind of strange vindictiveness against Fate—and Lady Byron—for treating him so shamefully, and taking little Ada away from him.

CLAIRE (*violently*) : And so he would keep Allegra from me !—I believe you are right—I see it all now.—And because of that he heaps every shame and insult on my head !—

MARY (*shrewdly*) : Perhaps he gets a sadistic pleasure out of it—

CLAIRE (*wildly*) : How can he ? . . . How can he ? . . . by torturing me like this, and exposing his own child to discomfort and dangers ! . . . Oh, when I think of her in that terrible Convent I nearly go mad.—

[*She bursts into hysterical weeping.*]

MARY (*trying to comfort her*) : Claire ! . . . Claire ! . . . You mustn't give way like this.—You must control yourself.—We each have the shadow of a Convent across our lives—at this moment—but we mustn't let it darken our minds entirely.—

CLAIRE (*wiping her eyes*) : But your's is more transient than mine.—Emilia may be removed from St. Anna at any moment, and married to a rich old man—like La Guiccioli was—

MARY (*impatiently*) : I wish to goodness she would be—she could pray to her Saints just as well outside those Convent walls as within !—

CLAIRE (*caustically*) : Especially as she could change the Saint every time she changed her Lover !—adopting the one of his choice, as the custom is in Italy, I understand !—

[SHELLEY and EMILIA VIVIANI are seen walking towards them through the Garden, on to the Loggia Back-stage, behind the Centre Doorway.

MARY (*going on with her Drawing without looking up*) : Is that them ?—I hear voices and footsteps. . . .

CLAIRE (*looking out, getting up and going to Doorway*) : Yes—there they come—Shelley is reading something to her—I expect it's the " Epipsy-chidion."

MARY (*determinedly*) : I must read it.

CLAIRE (*nervously*) : I shouldn't—you mightn't like it.

MARY (*coldly*) : Why not ?—I always like Shelley's verse—even if I don't approve and agree with it.

CLAIRE : I know—but this is different—don't read it, Mary, please.—

[SHELLEY's voice is heard reading coming in through the Doorway from the Garden.

SHELLEY (*reciting*) :

“ Spouse ! . . . Sister ! . . . Angel ! Pilot of
the Fate

Whose course has been so starless ! O too
late

Beloved.—Oh, too soon adored by me ! ”

EMILIA (*effusively*) : Oh, my dear Brother—what Divine Poetry falls from your lips—your attentions overwhelm me, for I know that I do not deserve them. . . .

[*They are seen on the Loggia without.*

SHELLEY (*ecstatically*) : My divine Emilia—you are like a lovely singing Bird cooped up in that

dismal Convent—and it is only when I set you free—as now—in the Garden among the Trees and Flowers—that the Songs which you inspire spring up in my heart, and spill themselves at your feet. . . .

[CLAIRE turns to MARY on Stage, as SHELLEY picks flowers for EMILIA outside.

CLAIRE (*ironically*) : Our Shelley is most eloquent today—she will become Immortal before she knows it !—

MARY (*acidly*) : The sooner her Mother finds her a rich Italian husband the better.

CLAIRE (*sarcastically*) : I am afraid she is too good-looking for a Husband, and more the taste of a Lover !—However, they appear to procure both in Italy—like La Guiccioli—and keep *each* happy.

MARY (*cynically*) : The Count is certainly long-suffering.—But then all lovers are not so important as Byron—

CLAIRE (*ruefully*) : And all Women are not so clever as La Guiccioli.—I wish I knew how she does it—and keeps both happy.—But I must go back to the Masons, or Byron will be here, and it might be embarrassing for us all. . . .

MARY (*gathering up her Drawings*) : It would be—very—and I will come with you part of the way—before Shelley and Emilia come in here—I can't abide her raptures and effusions—calling me Sister—Dearest—and the like— !

[*They go out together quickly towards the Door Right, CLAIRE putting on her Bonnet and Scarf as they move.*

CLAIRE (*scornfully*) : No more can I—and she always tells me I need not be jealous, as Shelley is only a Brother to her !—as he is to me !—Pah !—Brother, indeed !

[CLAIRE follows after MARY hastily, as SHELLEY and EMILIA enter from the Loggia Centre Back.

EMILIA (*looking round*) : I thought I saw Mary

and Claire through the windows as we came along the Garden path?—

SHELLEY (*looking round likewise*) : So did I.—But we must have been mistaken.

EMILIA (*with relief*) : All the better, my beloved Brother, as I can now have a few more precious words alone with you, which I so seldom obtain.—

SHELLEY (*politely*) : What is the latest news of your family, my child?—

EMILIA (*pathetically*) : Alas !—You must come no more to St. Anna's, my dearest Shelley—nor any of your family !—My parents have forbidden me to see anyone—and the Signora Eresta connives with them.—She treated me yesterday in a most insolent manner—making outrageous insinuations against my relations with you—and your family—— !

SHELLEY (*amazed*) : Against me?—and Mary?—and Claire?—But what could be more natural—more innocent—than our mutual friendship for each other?—

EMILIA (*cheerfully*) : I told her all that—but she would not listen.—However, once I am married to this “figure-head” whom I have never seen, I shall be free to do as I like, and enjoy your company undisturbed.—

SHELLEY (*suspiciously*) : But perhaps your so-called “liberation” will divide us even more?—

EMILIA (*enthusiastically*) : Never ! I assure you !—once delivered from this prison of a Convent, I would follow you anywhere—even to the boundaries of the world.—That is, if *you* would make it possible for me? . . .

SHELLEY (*taken aback*) : How do you mean, Emilia? . . . I don't quite understand you.—

EMILIA (*confidentially*) : As you may have guessed, I am very short of Scudi at the moment—and if you would be generous enough to lend

me a sufficiently large sum for my immediate expenses—I would then be independent, and able to defy my parents—the Convent authorities—and the World !

SHELLEY (*embarrassed—aside to himself*) : When was this said to me before ? . . . You mean—you want *me* to finance you entirely, so that you can live independently of your Family, your future Husband—and everyone ?

EMILIA (*boldly*) : That is my dream, my adored Brother, so that I could then be free to continue this divine intimacy with you—and your family, of course—uninterrupted and perpetually. . . .

SHELLEY (*at a loss for words*) : But—but what would Mary and Claire say, if I added yet another commitment to my Bank account ?

EMILIA (*patronisingly*) : Mary is a little cold at times, I know—and hard over money matters—but I realise her worth, and she is a sensible woman. Whereas I always tell Claire not to be jealous, but to look upon me as a sister, who dotes—with her—on her adored Brother.

SHELLEY (*firmly*) : No, Emilia—lovely and pathetic as you are, I cannot accept the responsibility for your material welfare.

EMILIA (*pleadingly*) : But you have taken upon yourself my mental and spiritual—surely compared with that, the material is nothing !—You cannot refuse !—

SHELLEY (*disillusioned*) : I am afraid I can—I have learnt better, lately.—Godwin—Medwin—all my friends—have used the same arguments, and I realise their speciousness at last.

EMILIA (*in tears*) : Then I fear it is Farewell, Shelley—a long Farewell, perhaps—

SHELLEY (*steeling himself*) : I fear so, Emilia—but you will always be for me the type and symbol of the Eternal Feminine—the Ideal of Beauty and Love. . . .

EMILIA (*pathetically*) : I had rather been more Human—and less Deified !—Say Farewell to

dear Mary and Claire for me—and I will return their books when I have finished them.—Farewell, my dearest friend. (*Taking his hand and kissing it.*) Farewell. . . .

[*She goes off the Terrace Left, leaving SHELLEY desolate and disconsolate. MARY reappears in the Doorway. She comes up to SHELLEY quietly, putting her hand on his shoulder, as he turns quickly, taking her in his arms, hiding his face on her shoulder.*

MARY (*looking after EMILIA, bitterly*) : So—she has gone—I hope, for good ! . . .

SHELLEY (*regretfully*) : She has, Mary—and left me desolate—and disconsolate.

MARY (*resentfully*) : But why should you be, Shelley ? . . . You have me still.—Am I not enough ? . . . Have you forgotten all the things you said to me at Skinner Street ?—and beside my Mother's grave in St. Bartholomew's Churchyard ? . . .

SHELLEY (*loyally—but disillusioned*) : No, Mary, no—never—never.—But Emilia was an Inspiration to me—a Lodestar—an Ideal—though now I realise she was a Cloud instead of a Juno !

MARY (*sympathetically*) : Poor Shelley ! You are always having these disappointments, aren't you ?—Being hurled from the Stars down to Earth ?—First it was Harriet, then Miss Hitchiner—Claire—Emilia—and perhaps myself ? . . .

SHELLEY (*devotedly—but regretfully*) : Never—Never You, Mary.—You are the one constant thing to which I cling.—But Emilia was the personification of my poetic life and feelings.—

MARY (*understandingly*) : I know—you have to clothe your Verses in Flesh and Blood. . . .

SHELLEY (*dreamily*) : I think one is always in Love with something or other.—The error lies in seeking in a mortal image what is perhaps Eternal. . . .

MARY (*practically*) : Well, someone has come

into our Circle who combines them both very attractively, as far as I can see——

SHELLEY (*mystified*) : To whom do you allude?——

MARY (*seriously*) : You know perfectly well whom I mean——

SHELLEY (*vaguely*) : I haven't the remotest idea——

MARY : To Jane Williams, of course—the Wife of Edward, who was at Eton with you, and close friends of Tom Medwin's.

SHELLEY (*delightedly*) : Edward Williams !—Of course I remember him well !—Where is he ? . . . Why didn't Medwin tell me they were here ?——

MARY (*impatiently*) : Does Tom ever tell us anything sensible ? . . . (*Looking out.*) But he is bringing them up the Garden now.—There they come.—She is extremely graceful and pretty.—But I shouldn't think very clever, should you ?——

SHELLEY (*teasing*) : That would be a relief—after Blue-stockings like you and Claire !—But we shall see.——

[THOMAS MEDWIN *leads* EDWARD WILLIAMS *and his charming Wife JANE in from the Garden.*]

MEDWIN (*going up to him warmly*) : Shelley, my dear fellow, allow me to present my old friends Edward and Jane Williams—who have just landed at Leghorn from India,—and having heard so much of our Pisan circle, are anxious to join it.

SHELLEY (*stepping forward to greet them*) : And may I bid them welcome—both for my own sake, and Mary's—who is always pining for company, aren't you, my dear ? . . .

WILLIAMS (*taking SHELLEY's hand*) : How are you, Shelley ?—I don't expect you to remember me at Eton, when you used to raise the Devil ?—And were nearly as big a celebrity there as you are here ?——

SHELLEY (*welcomingly*) : Of course I do, Williams—only I hadn't written anything then, except some bad Latin verses.—But I am mighty glad to see you, my dear fellow. (*Bowing to JANE.*) And please present me to your charming wife.

JANE (*giving him her hand*) : Oh, my dear Mr. Shelley, I can't tell you what inexpressible pleasure it gives me to meet you!—after having read all your poems,—and heard your praises sung continually by Mr. Medwin here—

WILLIAMS (*interjecting*) : From the moment we landed at Leghorn till now, I promise you—

MEDWIN (*tactfully*) : No, no, before that, when I wrote you to India.—

SHELLEY (*to JANE*) : I wish all my readers were as appreciative, Mrs. Williams, but in any case, they could not all be so decorative—I am accustomed to Blue-stockings—but not to such attractive ones, am I, Mary?

MARY (*tartly*) : That is for you to judge, Shelley.—No doubt Mrs. Williams combines many admirable qualities, as I suggested before.—Perhaps you would like to remove your Bonnet? (*To Her.*)

JANE : Thank you, I should.

MEDWIN : You are quite right—Jane is an accomplished musician, Shelley,—and plays the harp divinely,—so you and she can have duets and write verses,—While Edward is a first-class pistol-shot and boat-sailor—having been in the East India Company and the Navy.

SHELLEY : Capital ! . . . So you will be able to join our Pistol Club with Byron, Taafé, Gamba, and the rest of us?—

WILLIAMS (*questioningly*) : A Pistol Club? . . . What is that, may I ask?—It sounds dangerous enough—like a League of Assassins !

MARY (*cynically*) : Which they very nearly are—firing indiscriminatingly at all and sundry, with weapons they can't control !

SHELLEY (*sharply*) : Nonsense, Mary.—Don't show your jealousy just because you aren't a man, and can't do the same !

MEDWIN (*to WILLIAMS*) : We ride each afternoon with Byron to a neighbouring Farm, have cakes and wine, and then practise pistol shooting at ranges, as it is forbidden in Pisa.

JANE (*naïvely*) : Why are you all so ferocious ?—There's no war on, is there ? . . .

MARY (*ironically*) : No, but there may be one at any moment, between the Greeks and Turks,—and they think their Pistols may prevent it—especially my Lord Byron's !

WILLIAMS (*awed*) : May I really meet the great Lord Byron, Medwin ?—

MEDWIN (*casually*) : Certainly—if he doesn't object to meeting you !—

MARY (*caustically*) : Meet him !—You can't avoid meeting him,—as he comes in any hour of the day or night, from his Palazzo Lanfranchi across the Arno, where he is living,—complete with his Menagerie, and the entire Gamba family.

WILLIAMS (*diffidently*) : Could I also bring my wild Irish friend Trelawny to meet him, do you think ?—He begged to come this afternoon to pay his respects to you all.—

MARY (*hospitably*) : By all means—I hope he will come—we are such poor exiles out here, that the more friendly faces we have round us the better.—Is that not so, Shelley ?

SHELLEY (*anxiously*) : You always say so, my dear, so I suppose it must be ! . . . But, by the way, where is Claire ?—I haven't seen her for hours—I hope she isn't hanging about waiting for Lord Byron ?—or there will be another intolerable scene when he arrives ! . . .

MARY : She has returned to Mrs. Mason's.—She only came in this afternoon to see me for a short time—to enquire for further news of poor little Allegra.

SHELLEY (*dejectedly*) : I fear she is incarcerated for good at the Convent at Bagnacavallo.—I can forgive Christianity many things—but not the institution of these living Tombs. . . .

MARY : We will plead with Byron again when he comes—but I fear it will be of no avail—He has a heart of stone.

JANE (*coolly*) : Except where the Ladies are concerned, I understand !

MARY (*sarcastically*) : But there are no vacancies in his retinue at the moment, I assure you——

MEDWIN (*contemptuously*) : Not with La Guiccioli, his monkeys, dogs, cats, horses, peacocks, and what nots !

SHELLEY (*warmly*) : Meanwhile, my dear Williams, you must come and take up your abode with us here.—The Inns in this town are unspeakable—as we have found to our cost, haven't we, Mary ?

MARY : We still carry the marks of our first night in the town ! (*Scratching her hand.*)

SHELLEY (*hospitably*) : There will be ample room for you all on the ground floor.—Mary and I will go and make all arrangements, if you will stay here, and Medwin will look after you, while we see that the Beds are usable ! . . . Come along, Mary.

MARY : Very well, Percy.

[SHELLEY and MARY go out Right together.]

JANE (*impressed*) : Well, Tom, he certainly lives up to your description !—I have never seen anyone who combines such Spirituality with sound Common Sense.—

MEDWIN (*admiringly*) : You should hear him translating Petrarch and Calderon !—Then you would not say Common Sense—but Genius—and you'd realise what a Scholar he is.

WILLIAMS (*enthusiastically*) : My fingers itch to do a Portrait of him, with his ethereal face, and long, dishevelled hair. . . .

MEDWIN (*facetiously*) : You will have plenty of opportunity while you are here, for he always looks like an unearthly Spirit with a mop of sea-weed !

JANE (*thoughtfully*) : His Wife is a strange-looking woman, too, with her pale luminous face, and intense, intellectual expression—rather frightening, I feel.

MEDWIN (*knowingly*) : Not as frightening or as cold as she looks—for underneath that icy exterior there beats a very palpitating heart.

JANE (*instinctively*) : I should think it must be rather a palpitating business to be married to a Shelley !—

WILLIAMS (*teasingly*) : Now do you realise how lucky you are, to have a plain Williams for a husband ?—

JANE (*retortingly*) : Perhaps I regret the monotony sometimes, Edward, and wish it were more palpitating. . . .

WILLIAMS (*reminiscently*) : It was exciting enough in India, when you left your first husband to run away with me ! . . .

JANE (*discontentedly*) : Yes, but it would have been far more exciting if we had never thought of marrying, and just pretended we were—

[*She is interrupted by a loud knocking on the door, as WILLIAMS looks confused.*

WILLIAMS (*silencing her*) : Shh ! . . . Don't talk wildly.—That will be Trelawny—I know his fist right enough. (*Going to Door.*) Come in, Tre, we are all here, ready to welcome you, our fierce Corsair !

[*TRELAWNY enters, a typical Corsair, bronzed, with piercing eyes, and flowing black hair.*

MEDWIN (*going towards him*) : How are you, Trelawny ?—We have been expecting you all day.—I brought Williams and his Wife to see Shelley and Mary, and they have quite lost their hearts to them already !

TRELAWNY (*hurriedly*) : I only arrived from Leghorn this moment, and came straight here to find you. How are you, Tom?—and Edward—and Jane?—It is good to see you all again.—As you see, I've lost no time in coming here, still smelling of pitch and tar !

MEDWIN (*patronizingly*) : And I have lost no time in arranging a meeting for you with Lord Byron !—He will probably be looking in here this evening, so you will have an opportunity of seeing "Don Juan" at first hand !

TRELAWNY (*sarcastically*) : Marvellous !—I never knew you to be as good as your word before, Tom !

JANE (*flatteringly*) : And Byron will have the opportunity of seeing his Corsair come to life !—the Man who has *lived* adventures, whilst he has only *written* them !—

[As TRELAWNY is looking round the Room, he suddenly sees a pair of glittering eyes fixed on him through the half-open door.

TRELAWNY (*turning round quickly*) : What's that ? . . . What do I see there ? . . . The glittering eyes of a Bird, or a Serpent ? . . .

[MEDWIN looks over his shoulder, laughing as he sees SHELLEY behind the Door.

MEDWIN (*laughingly*) : You may well say a Serpent !—Byron often calls him that, with his slim figure and shining eyes !

JANE (*looking round likewise*) : Why !—It is only Mr. Shelley ! . . . Come in, sir. This is our friend Edward John Trelawny, who has just arrived from Leghorn.

[SHELLEY glides in, blushing like a girl, holding out both his hands, as he goes up to TRELAWNY effusively.

SHELLEY (*welcomingly*) : How are you, Trelawny ? . . . I have heard so much of you from my cousin Tom Medwin here.—And now I see you are a friend of the Williamses too, so you are doubly welcome for their sake, too.

TRELAWNY (*taken aback*) : I can hardly believe that I am really speaking to the creator of 'Queen Mab' herself! . . .

SHELLEY (*delightedly*) : And I to the 'Corsair' himself!—You have certainly taken a leaf out of Byron's book!

MEDWIN (*interrupting*) : Tre must stay with us here, mustn't he, Shelley?—We can make room for him—with the Williamses—on the ground floor of the Palazzo, can't we?—

SHELLEY (*eagerly*) : Assuredly we can—you must all stay,—and be mighty welcome to us poor exiles!

[As SHELLEY turns smilingly to JANE, she touches the Book under his arm.

JANE (*inquisitively*) : What are you reading, Mr. Shelley?

SHELLEY (*shyly*) : Calderon's plays—I am translating passages in them.

JANE (*encouragingly*) : Oh! read it to us now!—please!

[SHELLEY blushes, looks suddenly shy, shakes his head, turns, and glides out of the room again swiftly, reading and muttering as he goes.

TRELAWNY (*looking round*) : Where is He now? . . . He's vanished! . . . He's gone. . . .

JANE (*contritely*) : Have I frightened him away?—Oh! I'm so sorry! . . .

MEDWIN (*airily*) : Oh, he comes and goes like that—like one of his own Spirits.—You never know if he's in or out of the room!

JANE (*nervously*) : How very uncanny! . . . I should not like to be married to a man like that.—You would never know where you were with him.—

MEDWIN (*contemptuously*) : Mary certainly has an exciting life—no monotony, I can tell you.—I expect he's gone to get her—and some Tea.—No gathering is complete here unless we have Tea!

TRELAWNY : The result of a Tee-total household, I expect.—But a very sensible substitute at this hour of the afternoon.

WILLIAMS (*mockingly*) : Come, come, Trelawny ! . . . It's no use pretending you've turned Tee-total since we last saw you !

TRELAWNY (*caustically*) : I wouldn't pretend anything so absurd.—All Tee-totallers are either mad, or have some secret vice, to make up for their unnaturalness !

MEDWIN (*ironically*) : Quite right, Tre—and no one could call *you* anything but a Child of Nature !

TRELAWNY (*seriously*) : But tell me, seriously, what is Mary Shelley like ? Is she a real Blue-stocking ?—short-sighted, with pince-nez, and a squint ? . . .

WILLIAMS (*laughing*) : Not at all !—She is a very charming creature, with quiet grey eyes, a lovely white brow, and coils of fair hair.

JANE (*teasingly*) : Say no more, Edward, or I shall begin to be jealous !

MEDWIN (*looking through Doorway*) : Shh ! . . . Be careful.—Here she comes, with Shelley—and the Tea !—as I said !

[MARY and SHELLEY enter, followed by a MAID carrying a tray of Tea, etc.]

SHELLEY (*leading MARY forward*) : Mary, this is Mr. Trelawny,—of whom we have heard so much from Tom—who has just arrived from Leghorn.

MARY (*holding out her hand welcomingly*) : How do you do, Mr. Trelawny ? . . . It is a real pleasure to meet someone from the World of Action—when we live in a Universe of our own Imagination.—

TRELAWNY (*taking her hand awkwardly*) : And it is a rare honour to me to meet the celebrated Author of "Frankenstein," Madam—that amazing creation of the Imaginative World—

MARY : Thank you. (*Turning to the others.*) Won't you all sit down and have a real English tea with us?—It is one of the few occasions when we try to forget we are exiles, and ostracised in a foreign land.

[*They all seat themselves round the Tea-table S.R.*

SHELLEY (*eating greedily*) : Mary makes these little cakes which I can never resist—they are far better for you—and infinitely more appetising—than any Cow's meat, I assure you, Mrs. Williams.

JANE (*surprised*) : But I never eat meat at Tea-time, Mr. Shelley !

SHELLEY (*dictatorially*) : It's as bad any time of the day—makes one ferocious and spotty !

MEDWIN (*rudely*) : Don't talk nonsense, Bysshe.—We aren't all as anæmic as you !—

MARY (*soothingly*) : Now you two, don't fight, even if you are Cousins !

SHELLEY (*outspokenly*) : But that's one of the prerogatives of Cousins.—What's the good of having Relations if you can't be rude to them, and tell them the truth?—

TRELAWNY (*frankly*) : I quite agree with you, Shelley—only I prefer to have no Relations—then I find I'm not so rude !

MARY (*eagerly*) : And now tell me all the latest news of London and Paris, Mr. Trelawny? . . . the newest Books, Operas, and Plays? . . . What Bonnets are they wearing, and how are the latest Fashions? . . . the most recent Murders, Marriages, and other Marvels? . . . I simply ache to know ! . . .

TRELAWNY (*sneeringly*) : Madam, although I live in the World, I am afraid it is not the World of Society and Fashion !

SHELLEY (*his mouth full*) : Sensible fellow !

WILLIAMS (*enthusiastically*) : Rather the World of adventure and action, Mrs. Shelley, which Lord

Byron describes so eloquently in his 'Corsair' and 'Don Juan'—

MARY (*tartly*) : But has never seen himself !—

TRELAWNY (*impatiently*) : All the better !—
Then I shall be able to give him a taste of the real thing.—When is he coming to join us ?—by the way ?—

MARY : Any moment now.—He and the Contessa Guiccioli generally come and take tea with us at this hour, before he goes with Shelley and Taafe for Pistol-shooting at a Farm near by.

[SHELLEY has strolled to the Window, and is looking out,

SHELLEY (*excitedly*) : Their Gondola is approaching now.—He is helping La Guiccioli out, and Taafe is with them.

[MARY joins SHELLEY at the Window.

MARY (*pettishly*) : So he is—and Teresa has yet another new dress on today !—No wonder the Count is jealous of having his Wife so well dressed by somebody else !

JANE (*to WILLIAMS*) : Oh, Edward, I am quite in a flutter at meeting the great Poet face to face—with his Lady-love and all—it seems almost indecent !

TRELAWNY (*cynically*) : Like looking into History, and seeing oneself Famous !—

MEDWIN (*crudely*) : Or Notorious—they are synonyms, really.

WILLIAMS (*aside to JANE*) : Calm yourself, my dear Jane ; if we are going to live here, we must accustom ourselves to hobnobbing with the great.—

JANE (*whispering nervously*) : I'm so nervous ! Do I look all right ? Where is my mirror ? . . . and smelling salts ? . . . (*Taking them out of her bag.* SHELLEY goes out to meet BYRON and LA GUICCIOLI.)

MEDWIN (*patronizingly*) : Don't upset yourself, my dear Lady—no man is worth it—more

especially Byron, who is not such a bad fellow really, if you forget he's a Poet and a Lord, and treat him as an ordinary Human Being ! . . .

TRELAWNY (*bluntly*) : And not the Rip he is ? . . .

MEDWIN (*carelessly*) : Oh, he trades on that, but he's tried to live it down lately.

JANE (*running up to MARY excitedly*) : Do I curtsy to the Contessa, Mrs. Shelley ?—

MARY (*snobbishly*) : Certainly not.—She is a little common, really—and would take advantage of any subservience on your part.

MEDWIN (*cuttingly*) : I always say she would be taken for a good-looking Ladies' Maid at Home—if it weren't for her fine feathers !

MARY (*silencing him*) : Shh !—Here they come—Shelley is bringing them up the steps—and La Guiccioli has very keen ears ! . . .

[BYRON and LA GUICCIOLI come up the steps from the Gondola on Backcloth, led by SHELLEY and accompanied by TAAFE, the comic Irishman and butt of the party. MARY welcomes them as they come through the Doorway, preceded by BYRON's Bull-dog MORETTO, a surly brute, who growls at them all, and sniffs at JANE's petticoats.

JANE (*terrified*) : Oh, help ! . . . help ! . . . He's going to bite—to bite— !

BYRON (*laconically*) : Don't mind him, Madam, he's only being indecently inquisitive, as he generally is.—

JANE (*timidly*) : Oh ! . . . he's quite tame, I suppose, really. . . .

BYRON (*smilingly*) : Perfectly—except with Ladies—to whom he makes importunate advances !—What a party you have here today, Mary !—Pray introduce us to your Salon ?

MARY (*presenting them*) : Mr. and Mrs. Williams, and Mr. Trelawny—Lord Byron, La Contessa Teresa Guiccioli, and Mr. Taafe.

[SHELLEY leads LA GUICCIOLI and TAAFE forward. They all bow and exchange greetings.

LA GUICCIOLI (*curtseying*) : Buon giorno, Signori e Signore,—What a charming gathering, my dear Mary !—You and Shelley are becoming quite Social ! . . . I always said Pisa was the centre of English culture in Italy !

BYRON (*interposing*) : You'd better not say that to other English trippers in Italy, my dear ! . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*naïvely*) : Why not ? . . . It's true . . . with my divine Shelley here ! . . .

[*She puts her hand on his arm.*]

BYRON (*ironically*) : They might retort that Pisa was the centre of an atheistical coterie of Madmen, outside the pale of civilization—— !

LA GUICCIOLI (*gaily*) : Oh, what long words you use, mio Biron ! . . . I can't understand them !

TRELAWNY (*interrupting*) : But within the magic circle of poetry, milord——

BYRON (*quizzically*) : Poetry ? . . . Poetry ? . . . eh ? . . . (*Looking TRELAWNY up and down curiously.*) If you are addicted to poetry, Young Man, go and read the verses I was delivered of last night—or rather this morning—in the early hours—always the hardest birth.—But I am becoming coarse—and I shall soon be scurrilous—— !

LA GUICCIOLI (*wittily*) : You are often that, mio Biron,—but if you were not, you might cease to be famous !

MARY (*seating herself at Tea-table*) : Will you have some tea, Albé ?—weak or strong ? . . .

BYRON (*waving her aside*) : Not for me, Mary—I'm slimming, on soda-water and biscuits.—Aren't I thinner already ? . . . Although I may fall for a little wine and cake !—when we start pistol shooting later.——

SHELLEY (*severely, coming up to BYRON*) : You certainly fell last night, Albé, when you and Medwin and Taafe all made Vats of yourselves over the Claret, till three this morning ! . . .

MEDWIN (*retorting*) : And you made a tank of yourself by drinking water, Shelley !

BYRON (*epigrammatically*) : We young Whigs imbibe Claret, and so save our constitutions ;—the Tories stick to Port, and destroy their's and their Constituencies !——

TAAFE (*breaking in*) : While Shelley ruins his Health and our Spirits by swilling that most dangerous of liquids, unadulterated——

SHELLEY (*triumphantly*) : Water—the best drink in the world !—except, perhaps, for Tea !

BYRON (*casting his eyes up mockingly*) : The Lord deliver us—and send us Claret in due season !

WILLIAMS (*politely*) : You look very well on it, milord, if I may say so.—In fact, I should almost say you are getting fatter,—and looking heartier than your portraits——

BYRON (*furiously*) : Fatter ! . . . Heartier ! . . . Do you really mean that ? . . .

WILLIAMS (*shaking nervously*) : Why yes, sir. . . . But no offence meant, I assure you ! . . .

BYRON (*savagely*) : No offence !—Do you call it a Compliment to say I am getting fat—like a Hog ? . . .

[*He turns to TRELAWNY furiously.*]

What is your opinion, sir ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*tactfully*) : I have none—as I see Medwin is taking notes of our conversation—for Posterity, no doubt !

SHELLEY (*pityingly*) : Poor Posterity !—What it has to put up with !—I should have thought one Boswell was enough !

MEDWIN (*defending himself*) : Not at all—every Generation must have one—and every Great Man——

SHELLEY : Mary is mine—but under strict supervision !

BYRON (*muttering*) : But they dare not publish them——

TRELAWNY (*shrewdly*) : Oh, daren't they?—If it pays them, they dare quick enough !

BYRON (*aside*) : Fat ! . . . He says I am getting fat ! . . . The Beast ! . . . I can hardly keep my hands off him.—I shall live on Biscuits and Soda-water the rest of my days—or shoot myself !

SHELLEY (*seriously*) : If you have a fear of getting fat, Albé, I have an equal fear—which is even worse—as Mary has threatened me——

BYRON : Threatened you with what ? . . .

JANE (*interrupting skittishly*) : To box your ears, Mr. Shelley ? . . . Which I would do, if I were your wife !

SHELLEY (*horror-stricken*) : Oh, far worse than that ! . . . She says she must have a Party !—There are some English Singers here, the Sinclairs, and she will ask them, and everyone she knows ! . . . Oh, the horror of it ! . . .

[*They all burst out laughing, except MARY and WILLIAMS.*]

SHELLEY (*shrilly*) : Oh ! it will kill me—I know it will—to be cooped up with such people for a whole evening !

JANE (*tauntingly*) : Music kill you ? . . . But I thought you loved Music ?—Oh, you Poets ! . . . What Hypocrites you are !

SHELLEY (*irritably*) : So I do—it's the Company that terrifies me !—For pity's sake, intercede with Mary for me. . . . I will submit to any other sort of torture, except being done to death by Boredom, with idle Men and Women, to whom one has to be polite ! . . .

MARY (*firmly*) : But you never are, Shelley, so what are you fussing about ?—But I have set my heart on this Party, and I am going to have it.—But to please you all, it shall be limited to those already here !

BYRON (*cheerfully*) : Good !—I am always ready for a party, on any excuse——

MARY (*reluctingly*): And instead of the Sinclairs, we'll have only our few familiar friends, like Pietro Gamba and Prince Mavrocardato, who teaches me Greek, and Mrs. Mason——

BYRON (*cutting in*): Not that Woman—I refuse to come if you invite her.—She is in league with Claire—and you'll be asking *her* next, I suppose, if I'm not careful?——

MARY (*retorting*): Not at all, Byron.—I want this to be a Party—not a Funeral!—and instead of Music, we'll have food and wine—in deference to your tastes—as a Poet! . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*clapping her hands*): Oh, splendido!—It will be a real party, and we shall all get gloriously drunk!——

SHELLEY (*outspokenly*): Not in my house, Contessa.—You will have to have it at the Palazzo Lanfranchi, if you want to do that.

LA GUICCIOLI (*lightly*): What matter where we have it?—so long as we do—and Byron gives me a new dress!

BYRON (*sulkily*): I shall have to do that, anyway, party or no party, I suppose!

LA GUICCIOLI (*naïvely*): Of course, mon cher ami! . . . You can't expect to enjoy yourself without paying for it!

BYRON (*cynically*): I have realized that.—But I am so out of date with English Society that I have almost forgotten their customs. You must tell me what their latest conceits are, Williams?

WILLIAMS (*awkwardly*): I'm afraid I'm not exactly a Society man myself, sir!

BYRON (*sarcastically*): But at least you know their newest barbarisms?—Does Rank lead the way, or does the Ambassadors pair us off into the Dining-room? Do they ask people to Wine?—Or do we exit with the Women—or stick to our Claret?

WILLIAMS (*casually*): Some do—some don't, sir—it's a matter of Taste.—

TRELAWNY (*breaking in*) : And Inclination, I expect, sir.

JANE (*archly*) : But I am sure if Lord Byron is at the party, the Ladies will want him to prefer *them* to the Claret !

MARY (*magnanimously*) : I agree with Jane.—But so long as you allow us a Party, we'll allow you your Claret !

SHELLEY (*pityingly*) : Poor Mary !—Her's is a sad fate—she can't bear Solitude—nor I Society—the Quick coupled with the Dead ! . . .

MARY (*teasingly*) : Nonsense, Percy ! . . . What a wild goose you are !—If my thoughts stray from our retreat it is to the Opera, or my new dress from Florence—and especially the Ivy Leaf for my hair—and not to your whims and fancies, you silly fellow !

LA GUICCIOLI (*mockingly*) : These are serious matters, Mr. Shelley, and enough to ruffle the severest temper,—such as your Wife's,—I assure you !

MARY (*conventionally*) : But as to you, Albé, and your ungallant comparisons between us and Claret, it is the ridiculous custom to have Men at Balls and the Opera, so I must needs take Shelley with me, though with his uncouth ways—and yours—you will be taken for Valentine and Orion !—

BYRON (*flippantly*) : Surely you would not be like Mrs. Beauclerk's litter of Daughters, who must dance for their living ?—

MARY : No, Albé, we would renounce all these foolish pleasures, and betake ourselves to a Desert island in the midst of the seas, where we would be alone with our Children and a few boon Companions—such as you, of course—

BYRON (*contemptuously*) : I am flattered you include me among the chosen elect !

MARY (*seriously*) : But as we cannot do that, we are contemplating going to Spezzia for the

summer—and we wondered if you would consider joining us there—with Teresa—and Allegra?—

BYRON (*shrewdly*) : Will Claire be there? . . . Is that the reason for the invitation? . . . I thought there must be some catch to it!—

SHELLEY (*tactfully*) : Certainly not.—Claire is teaching German to the family of Botigis at Florence.—But we thought Allegra might benefit with a little change from her Convent life at Bagnacavallo, and could come to us and our Children for a few weeks at Lerici?—

BYRON (*growling*) : A very pretty suggestion, if Claire was not to be there.—But I never trust any Woman—especially a jealous and prejudiced Mother—

LA GUICCIOLI (*tauntingly*) : Or Wife—you don't know which is worse, do you, mio pauvra Biron?

MARY (*anxiously*) : What news of small Allegra by the way? . . . Is she still well and happy?—

BYRON (*casually*) : As far as I know—although she had a slight fever when we last heard.—But we were assured it was nothing—

SHELLEY (*concerned*) : There were rumours of typhus at Romagna, so we were naturally anxious. . . .

BYRON (*haughtily*) : You have no cause to be, I assure you.—I am quite capable of looking after my own Child.

MARY (*judiciously*) : We don't doubt that.—But we thought you might like a little feminine assistance at times. . . .

LA GUICCIOLI (*patronizingly*) : Which I am providing, my dear Mary.—I left word for the Courier to come straight here from the Palazzo, if there was any more news of her.—

BYRON (*ironically*) : Good—you would make an excellent Mother, my dear—although I don't

think I will give you the opportunity.—I am not expecting any fresh news this evening. (*Turning to the Others.*)—Now, Gentlemen, what about riding out for our pistol practice?—

SHELLEY (*rising*) : The Horses are saddled—the pistols are ready—(*Taking them down off the wall, and handing them to each of the Men*)—And the half-crowns are in your pocket, I hope—Albé?—

BYRON (*rising also*) : They are indeed, and Tita has the sticks on which to fix them. (*Calling out.*) What ho ! Tita, are you there?—and all ready?—

[*He goes to Verandah back, on which TITA, his gigantic Italian Servant, appears.*

TITA (*bowing*) : All ready, Milord, and awaiting your commands.

BYRON (*rubbing his hands*) : Excellent.—Come along, Gentlemen,—let us pit our eyes against each other,—and leave the Ladies to discuss their petticoats and furbelows ! . . .

[*The Men all rise, bowing to the Women, and go towards the Door Back, when TITA reappears with a Message for BYRON.*

TITA (*excitedly*) : A Message, milord, post-haste from Bagnacavallo !—

BYRON (*taking it from him*) : Another message ? . . . When did it come ? . . . Who brought it ? . . . What does it say ? . . . Let me see ? . . .

[*He tears open the paper, reads it,—sways, clutches his head, leans back against the wall to save himself from falling, as LA GUICCIOLI rushes up to him, and the Others stand round aghast.*

LA GUICCIOLI (*anxiously*) : Biron ! . . . mio Biron ! . . . What has happened ? . . . Is there bad news ? . . . Is Allegra worse ? . . .

[*BYRON bows his head. She seizes his hand, putting it to her lips, as He closes his eyes, muttering brokenly, while SHELLEY takes the letter from him, reading it half-aloud, as he murmurs.*

SHELLEY (*muttering as he reads*) : Claire. . . .
Poor Claire ! . . . You have had your revenge
indeed !——

[*The Others rush towards BYRON as He almost faints.—As the Curtain descends, SHELLEY is seen standing re-reading the letter with wide, horror-struck eyes, as though He had seen a ghost, murmuring, “ Claire ! . . . Poor Claire ! . . . ” as the*

CURTAIN FALLS. ♀

ACT FIVE

SCENE I

THE SALON AT THE CASA MAGNIAT
LERICI, SPEZZIA, APRIL 1822

MARY, JANE, and WILLIAMS are seated together having Coffee at Night, with SHELLEY pacing distractedly up and down the Room, as the Others talk in hushed, agonized Voices.

MARY (*desperately*) : How *can* we tell her? . . . It's impossible to break the news to her—I can't do it!—

JANE (*matter-of-factly*) : Surely it would be better to let her go to Mrs. Mason's at Florence, as she suggests?—and then let *her* tell her?—

WILLIAMS (*philosophically*) : She will hear soon enough.—Why should any of us tell her?—

SHELLEY (*nerving himself*) : She can't hear it from Strangers.—We must tell her ourselves.—One of us must do it—and at once.—Sh! . . . Here she comes. . . . Will you all go out on the terrace, and leave me with her?—I will tell her as best I can. . . .

[*He stops as CLAIRE comes in, Sleep-walking along the Terrace, with deadly white face, and eyes straining from their sockets. They all stop speaking, looking at her hypnotized, as She wanders in, then All go out quietly, leaving her alone with SHELLEY, up to whom she walks unseeingly.*

SHELLEY (*turning round*) : Claire! . . . Claire! . . . Whatever is the matter? . . . Where have you been? . . . What are you doing? . . .

[*He goes up to Her, laying a restraining hand on her arm.*

(*Terrified.*) How horribly you look—take your eyes off me ! . . . I can't bear it ! . . .

CLAIRE (*waking with a start*) : Don't touch me ! . . . (*She opens her eyes and looks at SHELLEY.*)—Oh, Shelley, is it you ? . . . (*With relief.*) Have you been to my room ? . . . Did you touch the pillow on my bed ? . . .

SHELLEY (*mystified*) : No, no, I haven't been near your room.—What do you mean ?—Why do you ask ?—

CLAIRE (*wildly*) : Because, when I turned my eyes away, a Pillow was removed from my bed to a chair some distance off—and obviously by no human power—— !

SHELLEY (*sensibly*) : But, Claire, that's impossible—Pillows don't walk on their own.—They haven't got legs—— !

CLAIRE (*insistently*) : But this one had !—I assure you it moved !—Come and see for yourself !

SHELLEY (*soothingly*) : No, no, I believe you.—But you are unhinged, you are not yourself, Claire.—All you have been through, with Albé, and poor little Allegra,—makes you hysterical and subject to delusions. . . .

CLAIRE (*seriously*) : No, Shelley, it is not only that.—There is something else which has upset my whole equilibrium of late.—Something which you must know of yourself, only too well——

SHELLEY (*surprised*) : I—— ? Know of—— ? What do you mean, Claire ? . . .

CLAIRE (*meaningly*) : You know perfectly well what I mean, Shelley. . . .

[*She holds his hand more closely, and looks up at him with emotion.*

SHELLEY (*amazed*) : You mean ? . . . But Claire, I thought you always prided yourself on reasonableness and capacity for friendship ? . . . How

can we ever be anything but friends when I am married to your Sister, and she has given up everything for me? . . .

CLAIRE (*unreasonably*): That has nothing to do with it.—She is your wife—materially and physically—Whereas I would be your spiritual and mental Affinity——

SHELLEY (*horrified*): But that goes against all our principles of philosophy, Claire——!

CLAIRE (*stubbornly*): Not at all.—Godwin taught us to follow the Dictates of the Heart and Will—irrespective of other peoples, and public opinion.——

SHELLEY (*bewildered*): But there is Albé.—I thought He was the constant object of your Affections?——

CLAIRE (*bitterly*): My Passion—Infatuation—call it what you will—But constant, never! . . . Changeable as the stars!—And latterly, cruel as the Grave. . . .

SHELLEY (*shocked*): Claire!—You must not be so bitter.—Nothing comes of bitterness—only pain and gall——

CLAIRE (*savagely*): But can you wonder I am bitter, when he has taken my Child from me?—and left me with nothing—but hatred in my heart——!

SHELLEY (*checking her*): Sh! . . . You must not say such things, Claire.—Hatred only breeds torment and anguish to those who nurture it. . . .

CLAIRE (*desperately*): It is all very well for you to talk, Shelley.—You are surrounded by Love and Affection—Whereas I crave and long for a passion deep, true, and abiding, such as you give to Mary——

SHELLEY (*taking her by the shoulders*): Now, Claire, be sensible. . . . Beware of giving way weakly to trivial sympathies and sentiment.—Content yourself with one great Affection—one single mighty Hope. . . .

CLAIRE (*retorting*) : But what if that hope and affection is dashed and spurned?—and flung back in one's face?—

SHELLEY (*lecturing her*) : Then let the rest of Mankind be the subject of your Benevolence.—But as you value your hours of Peace, never suffer more than *One* to approach the hallowed circle of your Love and Passion. . . .

CLAIRE (*questioningly*) : But if that *One* prove himself unworthy of all Love and Passion?—What then?—To whom—and to what—does one turn for consolation?—

SHELLEY (*firmly*) : To Friends and Companions.—Give up this idle pursuit after Shadows—Live from day to day.—Do not lose yourself in distant and uncertain plans—

CLAIRE (*bitterly*) : Shelley ! . . . At times you are a more hard-hearted and brazen philosopher than Godwin himself ! And yet you call yourself a Poet ! . . .

SHELLEY (*sensibly*) : My dear Girl, I am only trying to talk sense for once—and you don't seem to like it— !

CLAIRE (*passionately*) : I wish you would talk flesh and blood, for a change. . . .

SHELLEY (*humorously*) : Flesh and blood ? . . . You know I don't deal in those articles !—You might as well go to a Gin-shop for a leg of Mutton, as expect anything Human or Earthly from me . . . !

CLAIRE (*fatalistically*) : You are too inhuman for me, Shelley.—But I always knew, from the first day I saw you at Skinner Street, that you would cause me more suffering than any other Man I should ever meet. . . .

SHELLEY (*flattered*) : If I can excel Lord Byron in that, my dear, I am indeed unique ! . . . (*Bracing himself.*) But Claire, I have something to tell you—which the Others think you should know. . . .

CLAIRE (*frightened*): To tell me? . . . What is it? . . . Why do you look so strangely at me? . . . And where are the Others? (*Going quickly to Doorway leading to Terrace.*) Why are they all standing out there? . . . (*Calling out to them.*) Mary!—Jane!—Edward!—Why have you all deserted us?—What are you doing out there?—

[*They all gradually come back from the Terrace, WILLIAMS and JANE following MARY reluctantly.*]

MARY (*hesitatingly*): I was reading a letter which we had just had from Bagnacavallo . . . of which we wanted to tell you, Claire—But we thought Shelley would tell you better than any of us—

SHELLEY (*unhappily*): And I have told her *nothing*—except a lot of Philosophy, which she won't digest . . . !

MARY (*chiding him*): What is the use of you, Shelley, if you talk these vagaries?—Instead of telling Claire about . . . Allegra. . . .

CLAIRE: But I have just been reading one of Allegra's last Letters from the Convent—such darling little Letters, and written in quite good Italian, for a small Girl—showing her studies have not been neglected.—But she pleads for her Pappa and Mamina to go and see her, poor little Lamb.—Has Byron been recently, do you think?

SHELLEY (*bracing himself again*): I think he will go quite shortly, Claire, as we have heard that Allegra is ill at Bagnacavallo—

CLAIRE (*anxiously*): Ill? . . . What is the matter with her? . . . Not typhus! . . . Don't say it is the Typhus? . . .

MARY (*taking hold of her firmly by the arm*): I am afraid it is, Claire.—But you must be brave, my dear—I'm afraid she is rather bad.—But you must be brave, my dear. . . .

CLAIRE (*suspiciously*): Are you trying to hide

something from me? . . . Why do you all look so strange? . . . Are you trying to tell me there is no hope? . . .

SHELLEY (*facing her quietly*): I am afraid not Claire.—You must be very brave, my dear.—Here, hold on to me, while I tell you (*taking her other arm firmly*).

CLAIRE (*whispering agonizedly*): When did it happen? . . . Which day? . . . At what hour?—You must tell me—All of you—I must know everything . . . ?

MARY (*very gently*): On the 19th . . . early in the morning—very peacefully.—Byron heard almost at once—

CLAIRE (*frantically*): Then you knew all the time you were at Pisa?—When I was in Florence teaching those other Children?—Oh, why didn't you tell me? . . . Why didn't you let me know? . . . Oh! how could you keep it from me all these days? . . .

MARY (*very tenderly*): We wanted to spare you, Claire.—We couldn't bear to tell you—to hurt you so terribly—

CLAIRE (*ravingly*): No . . . it is *He* who has hurt me—so terribly.—It is *He*, not you.—He would part her from me even in Death—as he has always done—ever since she was born! . . .

SHELLEY (*gently*): He wanted to save you pain, Claire.—He is suffering terribly himself—remember that.

CLAIRE (*tragically*): Suffering? . . . What does He know of suffering? . . . Does he know how? . . . Perhaps he has learnt from me—I doubt it.—But there are two things I will beg of him—which he can't refuse me now—not if he has suffered . . . as I am suffering now. . . .

MARY (*anxiously*): What are they, Claire? . . . Not impossibilities, I hope? . . .

CLAIRE (*quietly*): I don't think so, Mary.—Only a last glimpse of her little Coffin—and a

Miniature of my Darling—with a lock of her Baby Hair. . . .

SHELLEY (*kindly*) : I will arrange that for you, Claire.—If necessary I will take you to Pisa or Leghorn myself—and I will write to Byron about it immediately.

CLAIRE (*gratefully*) : Thank you, Shelley—I knew I could count on you,—as I always have done—in this my darkest moment.—What arrangements will Byron make for the—end of it all, do you think ?

SHELLEY (*haltingly*) : I am not sure.—But I think he wishes to take her Home—to Harrow, if possible—where he was at School—in the Churchyard he loved there——

MARY (*interrupting*) : But his last words at Pisa were that he would allow Claire to make any arrangements she wished ?——

CLAIRE (*vehemently*) : A little late in the day, isn't it !—If he had been more amenable sooner, there might have been no need for it now ! . . . Oh, I can't bear it—to think of her lying there cold and dead, poor little darling !—surrounded by those strange, unfeeling Nuns !—and I not there to tend her, and hold her in my arms . . . !

[CLAIRE goes off Back, weeping hysterically.
JANE rises to follow her, but MARY holds her back.

MARY (*sensibly*) : Leave her alone, Jane—it is better to let her have it out.—She will be more peaceful, once the first paroxysms are over.

SHELLEY (*resignedly*) : You are right, Mary—there is nothing any of us can do or say—Death has said the last word.

MARY (*bustling about*) : Let us tidy the House and see about Supper.—It will take our minds off it—and you must all be famished.

JANE (*irritably*) : I can do nothing until I have my own pots and pans.—I have sent for mine to England—and it's impossible for my Servants

to work together with your's, Mary, in the same Kitchen, under our mutual supervision.

MARY (*annoyed*) : I'm afraid it's impossible to build another Kitchen, Jane—and as for these pots and pans, they were sent out from Home at great trouble and expense by Mrs. Leigh Hunt.

JANE (*stubbornly*) : All the same, I swear I shall be able to eat nothing till I can make something edible with my own utensils !

SHELLEY : Then you can come and starve with me in the Garden, on Fruits, Nuts, and Raisins, Jane ! . . .

JANE : Oh, lovely !—I should adore that.—If I could only return to a little order and method here in our Sitting-room, where I could sit comfortably and breathe regularly !

MARY (*haughtily*) : We lived in similar *dis-order* and discomfort for six years, and Shelley has managed to write 'The Revolt of Islam,' 'Alastor,' and 'Prometheus Unbound' in it.

JANE (*sarcastically*) : No doubt *dis-order* suits the poetic temperament—but it doesn't suit mine, I'm afraid !

MARY (*rudely*) : If Shelley can manage to create in it, possibly *you* might just manage to breathe ?—without putting too much strain on your organs ? . . .

JANE (*patronizingly*) : I will attempt it, Mary, to please you—although I always heard you had little consideration for anyone—— ! And now I know why poor Shelley always looks so ill, and has the commiseration of all his friends—— !

SHELLEY (*interrupting*) : How can you say such things, Jane ! . . .

JANE (*turning to him*) : Because they're true—And you both know it.—I'm going to make you a nice vegetable stew for your dinner, Shelley.—And you're going to eat it, whether you like it or not !——

[*She goes off Back laughing coquettishly at SHELLEY.*
SHELLEY (*sighing*) : It's a pity that anyone so pretty should be so tiresome ! . . .

MARY : If only she would be content to be a pretty Woman, and not a Housewife, like me !

SHELLEY (*complimenting her*) : You, my dear, are both, only you don't talk about it.

[*MARY smiles back at him, and kisses her hand to him, as She follows out after JANE. SHELLEY and WILLIAMS are left together looking after them, as WILLIAMS smokes a pipe.*

SHELLEY (*musingly*) : If only Jane would forget she is a Woman and just be a Musician—as she really is. I wrote a poem to her last night, after she played and sang in the Boat out in the Bay.—But she is so unlike it today, I feel like re-dedicating it . . . !

WILLIAMS (*casually*) : I shouldn't bother.—She's a Will o' the Wisp—this evening in the "Ariel" she'll be——

SHELLEY (*poetically*) : Miranda again—and I will sing "Ariel to Miranda ; Take, this slave of Music for the sake of him who is the slave of thee. . . ."

[*He looks out back across the Sea, walking along the Terrace.*

How lovely that light is upon the water !—Like diamonds—"Inpattined with bright gold"—

[*He suddenly clasps WILLIAMS by the arm.*

I feel unusually nervous and strange tonight, Edward—I suppose it is the effect of the news on Claire—and that terrible look on her face. . . . (*His face changes colour, as he looks out towards the sea.*)

WILLIAMS (*rising anxiously*) : Shelley ! . . . What's the matter ? . . . Are you ill ? Are you in pain ? . . .

SHELLEY : No, no, not at all. . . . But look there. . . . (*He points out to Sea.*) Look ! . . . Look ! . . . There it is again ! . . . There ! . . .

WILLIAMS (*mystified, gazing out*) : What ? . . . Where ? . . . What ? . . . What are you pointing at ? . . . I can't see anything. . . . What is it, Shelley, what is it ?

SHELLEY (*ecstatically*) : Don't you see it ? . . . There . . . as plain as day . . . as plainly as I see you—a Naked Child rising from the Sea, and clapping its hands in joy and smiling at me ! . . .

WILLIAMS (*straining his eyes*) : A Child ! . . . What Child ! . . . Allegra ? . . . (*Taking SHELLEY by the arm.*) Come away, Shelley, come away, . . . You mustn't let your fancy run away with you like this. . . . Come away at once . . . !

SHELLEY (*still looking out*) : Look ! . . . There is the "Ariel" sailing into the Bay !—Let us go down to the beach and have a sail in her ?—by Moonlight—while the tide is up—and I'll take my Plato with me—

WILLIAMS (*relieved*) : Very well—and Captain Roberts should be there with the Cabin boy, Charles Vivian, who will make a good Sailor in time.

SHELLEY : Come along then—I'll race you down to the shore.

[*As they spring out across the Terrace, JANE and TRELAWNY come into the Room from a Side Entrance, watching them go.*]

JANE (*surprised*) : Where are they going ? . . . They seem in a great hurry about something—

TRELAWNY (*looking out*) : So they are.—I expect they've gone off to the "Don Juan"—she's just come into harbour.

JANE (*contradicting him*) : The "Ariel" you mean.—Shelley is determined to call her that, despite whatever Byron—Lord and Poet as he is—may say !

TRELAWNY (*ironically*) : "Ariel" ! . . . In compliment to you, I suppose ? . . . After your moonlight evening with Shelley last night, sailing to the accompaniment of your Guitar ? . . .

JANE (*shivering*) : It was terrible—we went out with the Children in that frail bark into deep blue waters. . . . And he suddenly cried, “ Now let us solve the great mystery together ! ” . . . “ Solve the mystery ! ” . . . I cried. “ Why, you are the greatest of all mysteries ! . . . Who can predict what you will do next ? ”—Whereupon I beguiled him into the Shore again, snatched up the Babes, and clambered out, into shallow water—— !

TRELAWNY (*laughingly*) : Then the Punt capsized, and Edward and I picked you out—— ! Shelley was underneath the Boat, and rose with it partly on his back, like a turtle or a Hermit Crab !—which houses itself in any empty shell it can find !——

JANE (*seriously*) : If it hadn't been for you and Edward we should certainly have been drowned ! . . .

[*She suddenly looks round, seeing a shadow of SHELLEY passing on the Terrace.*

(*Terrified.*) Good God ! . . . What's that ? . . . Can Shelley have leapt from the wall ? . . . Where can he have come from ? . . . Where has he gone ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*mystified*) : Shelley ? . . . No Shelley has passed.—What do you mean ? . . .

[*JANE trembles violently, TRELAWNY puts his arm round her to support her.*

JANE (*weakly*) : I don't know—I can't say.—But I swear it was he walking across the Terrace ! . . .

TRELAWNY (*incredulously*) : That's impossible ! —We saw him ourselves go down to the shore with Edward, not five minutes ago—— !

JANE : Perhaps he came back sooner than we expected.—He may have forgotten something——

TRELAWNY (*logically*) : Not likely, once he got into the boat.—Besides, he would have to pass

through here—and leap over the wall—to reach the Terrace.

JANE (*awe-stricken*) : That's the amazing thing !—It would have been impossible for him to pass otherwise——

[MARY *re-enters from Side Entrance on Right, reading a Letter, looking ill, and holding her heart, as though she might faint.*

MARY (*diffidently*) : Oh, I hope I am not disturbing you?—I didn't know you two were here alone.—Where is Shelley? . . . I have some news for him from the Leigh Hunts.—They are arriving at Leghorn in a few days, and were at Genoa yesterday.

JANE : But Mary—what is the matter?—You look terribly ill? . . .

MARY (*faintly, sinking into a Chair and holding her side*) : It is nothing—it will pass.—Only since my last miscarriage I feel terribly ill at times, and have a horrible presentiment of evil in this place—which I can't shake off——

JANE (*sympathetically*) : I know—I sometimes have the same.—And yet I can't explain it—like a bad dream that one can't remember—and yet can't forget——

TRELAWNY (*matter-of-factly*) : The whole place has got on both your nerves.—You ought to get away from it.—It has never suited you really, Mary—and now the effect of Allegra's death, and your recent illness——

MARY (*hysterically*) : And Shelley's Nightmares—he reeled into my room last night, saying you and Edward had come to him in the most horrible condition—your bodies lacerated, bones starting through your skin, your faces pale yet stained with blood—and Edward had cried, “Get up, Shelley—the sea is flooding the house—and it is all coming down——!”

TRELAWNY (*looking out*) : And well it might, on a rough day, if the waves broke over the Terrace!——

JANE : Don't be morbid, Tre. . . .

MARY (*horrifiedly*) : Then worse still—his Vision changed—and he saw Himself strangling Me ! . . .

JANE (*prosaically*) : How very unpleasant !—sometimes I wonder how you can bear to be married to him ?—

TRELAWNY (*casually*) : Poets and Madmen—they are all the same—and yet we all love them—— !

MARY (*desperately*) : Then he sees the figure of Himself meeting Him on the terrace, saying, “ How long do you mean to be content ? ” . . .

JANE (*uncomprehendingly*) : Whatever did he mean by that ? . . .

MARY : Who can say ? . . . Not even himself ! . . .

[SHELLEY is seen coming towards them, in the distance.

TRELAWNY (*whispering*) : Sh ! . . . Here he comes in the flesh.—Say nothing of all this, Jane, it may unsettle him.—

JANE (*tactfully*) : Naturally—not a word.—The Leigh Hunts' arrival will take his mind off all these delusions, I hope.—

[SHELLEY and WILLIAMS re-enter, coming in quickly across the Terrace.

SHELLEY (*excitedly*) : Mary ! . . . Mary ! . . . We hear you have received a letter from Genoa ?—Has Hunt arrived at last safely ? . . . and Marianne ?—and all the little Hottentots, as Byron calls them ? . . .

MARY (*with relief*) : Yes, Percy, yes.—And they should reach Leghorn by tomorrow, or the day after, at latest.—

SHELLEY (*decisively*) : Then we must sail at once.—Captain Roberts is all prepared, and by tomorrow morning we should cast anchor in Leghorn harbour, eh, Edward ?—

WILLIAMS (*looking out*) : If this breeze holds from the West.—It is a chance not to be missed of a fair wind——

SHELLEY (*impatiently*) : Then we must go immediately.—Are you ready, Tre?——

TRELAWNY (*readily*) : Absolutely, Shelley.—I am always ready to go to sea—but never to return ashore !

SHELLEY (*clapping him on the back*) : Bravo !—That's the answer I like to hear !—But why are you looking so glum-face, Mary, my dear ? . . .

MARY (*desperately*) : I hate you going—I know not why—But I hate it with all my heart !——

SHELLEY (*gently*) : Come now.—You wouldn't be selfish, and prevent me from meeting the Hunts?—who have spent so many months coming out to us ?

MARY (*reluctantly*) : No, I suppose not.—I will go and pack some things for you.——

SHELLEY (*airily*) : No need—I have my Plato and Æschylus.—What more do I want ?—since the “Ariel” has Ships' Biscuits and water?—There are some raisins in my pocket—and we shall be at Leghorn by morning.

TRELAWNY (*devoutly*) : Jove be willing !

MARY (*pleadingly*) : Oh, I wish you wouldn't go, Percy—I have an uneasy feeling about it, which I can't explain.—Let me come too, if you must go, and look after you?——

SHELLEY (*laughingly*) : Look after me?—You would merely be sea-sick all the time, my dear—as you were crossing the Channel, with your head between my knees ! . . .

MARY (*protestingly*) : No, no, Percy—I am a much better Sailor now, since we've sailed in the Bay, and on the Lakes, out here.

SHELLEY (*affectionately*) : My beloved Mary ! . . . You are a perfect Wife, but an indifferent Sailor—and I would not have you otherwise—your place is in our Home, looking after our

Babe, and preparing an excellent supper against our return !

MARY (*sarcastically*) : Jane would do that a thousand times better than I !—

JANE (*good-humouredly*) : Nonsense, Mary !—We will prepare it together—and have a competition over the Dishes—which they will like best !

MARY (*reluctingly, then firmly*) : I give in before we begin !—But seriously, Shelley, unless I see you soon, I shall go to Pisa with the Child—

SHELLEY (*severely*) : You must do nothing of the kind—in your bad state of health.—Jane, I leave you in charge of my precious and head-strong Mary.—Take good care of her, comfort and solace her, and keep her in order against my return.

JANE (*gaily*) : I will, Shelley—with all my heart.—And do you do likewise with Edward.—I commend him to your care—and you to his.—May you guard and succour each other against every prank and danger— !

TRELAWNY (*interrupting*) : And what about me ? . . . Why should I be left out of these tender ministrations ?—

JANE (*mockingly*) : Oh, you are well able to look after yourself, Tre—I have no misgivings for you—you have done it for so many years, you would hate anyone else to interfere, least of all any Woman !

TRELAWNY (*jovially*) : That's all you know me ! . . . Well then, I appoint myself to look after both Shelley and Edward, as they are each incapable of doing it themselves, Poets and Artists as they are— !

WILLIAMS (*modestly*) : Speak for yourself, old Sea-dog ! . . . I don't presume to be in the same category as Shelley—although I *have* written an unpublished play—

TRELAWNY (*tauntingly*) : Very modest of you, I'm sure—especially with Milord Byron about—

whom I have no doubt we shall see in the "Bolivar" at Leghorn, as soon as we drop anchor.

SHELLEY (*anxiously*) : I trust so—as then I can enquire about his plans for poor little Allegra, and what he proposes to arrange for Claire——

[CLAIRE is at that moment seen approaching in the distance.

TRELAWNY (*scornfully*) : Which he has not even considered—if I know his Lordship !

MARY (*warningly*) : Sh ! . . . here is Claire.—Be careful what you say.—Remember how susceptible she is to the mention of his name at all——

CLAIRE enters, having overheard their last words.

CLAIRE (*dispassionately*) : There is no need—I am susceptible no longer.—Nothing can move me now.—Say what you will, any of you.—Nothing can ever hurt or touch me again.

[SHELLEY goes up to her gently, taking her hand.

SHELLEY (*softly*) : Not even my leaving you, Claire ? . . . Does even that mean nothing to you at all any longer ?——

CLAIRE (*taken aback*) : Leaving me ? . . . Why are you leaving me ? . . . Why can't you take me too ? . . . I can't stay here alone ! . . .

SHELLEY (*soothingly*) : You will have Mary and Jane—isn't that enough ?

CLAIRE (*bluntly*) : No—not without you.—But where are you going ? Why ? . . . and for how long ? . . .

SHELLEY (*vaguely*) : Who can say ? . . . Ostensibly only for a day or two to Leghorn,—to meet the Hunts and Byron——

CLAIRE (*passionately*) : Then tell him all that I would say to him were I there.—All—and more—that is in my heart, as you know.—But stop !—No !—say nothing !—Not a word, do you understand, of all I am feeling ?—Just ask those two small favours I told you—especially for the little lock of hair, if you can remember. . . .

SHELLEY (*helpfully*) : Of course, Claire—I will do my very best, as you know.—But Albé is not always very docile—to say the least of it—— !

CLAIRE : When he becomes that, the Lion will assuredly have lain down with the Lamb !—but the time is not yet !

SHELLEY (*taking her hands*) : And now I must say goodbye, my dear.—And take good care of yourself, if you can——

CLAIRE (*bitterly*) : Myself.—What do I care for myself now ? . . .

SHELLEY (*unruffled*) : Then care for me and for Mary.—And take good care of *her*, for my sake—for she needs it, as much as you——

[*He turns to MARY, taking her in his arms affectionately.*]

Goodbye, Mary, my own—my dearest—and watch for my quick return.

MARY *embraces him passionately and silently.*

JANE (*cheerfully*) : Goodbye, Edward—and don't flirt too much with all the lovely Italianos you meet !

WILLIAMS (*merrily*) : If Marianne Hunt is an example, from her portrait, you have no need to fear, my dear !

[*He kisses her tenderly, which she reciprocates.*]

TRELAWNY (*mockingly*) : And this poor Rover is the only one without a girl in every port ! . . . Claire, will you not take pity on an old Buccaneer, and bid me a tender farewell likewise ? . . .

CLAIRE (*sardonically*) : No, you old Deceiver,—for you have the Sea, and the Wind, and Adventure, which you love better than any Woman—while we have nothing but you men to cling to. . . .

MARY (*mournfully*) : Claire is right.—But we must cling to each other while you are gone—Jane, Claire and I—cheering each other as we

watch each day and evening, until a Sail appears on the horizon of the Bay, and we know the "Ariel" has safely returned.

[SHELLEY follows her gaze ecstatically, out across the Bay.

SHELLEY (*dreamily*) : Ah ! This divine Bay ! . . . Where I have been reading Spanish dramas,—sailing,—bathing in sunshine and moonlight,—and listening to the most entrancing music on Jane's guitar !—

JANE (*beguilingly*) : I must play some more enchanting songs for you when you return.—

SHELLEY (*ecstatically*) : If the Past and the Future could be obliterated, the Present would content me so well, that I would say with Faust to the passing moment, "Stay—thou art so beautiful !" . . .

MARY (*passionately*) : If only it would !—If only things *could* stay as they are !—when they are beautiful and perfect—as certain moments have been here.—Only that I hate and fear the *Place itself*, when you are not beside me, Percy ! . . .

SHELLEY (*regretfully*) : But that is foolish, Mary—and my only regret.—I am sad that the Summer should pass, and that you have not the same passion for the place which I have.—

MARY (*violently*) : I hate it !—I hate it all !—The desolate house, and the strange country round it.—The jargon of the Genoese—the wild and hateful Natives.—And the Walnut and Ilex trees, which make me shudder and weep whenever I walk among them— !

SHELLEY (*amazed at her outburst*) : Mary ! . . . How can you ? . . . They are the most lovely companions in the world—

MARY (*gloomily*) : To you, perhaps, but not to me.—They fill me with gloom and forebodings.—But I know my nerves are on edge, and an awful sense of misfortune hangs over me. . . .

[A Shout is heard from the Bay, where CAPTAIN ROBERTS and CHARLES VIVIAN are signalling from the "Ariel" shown on Backcloth.

TRELAWNY (*looking out*): There is Roberts signalling from the "Ariel" for us to start.—If we want to reach Leghorn tomorrow we ought to go at once.

SHELLEY (*rapidly*): You are right—We must start immediately.—(*Snatching up a Book from a table.*)—My Sophocles! . . . Au revoir, Mary, my darling,—Claire—Jane.—(*Taking each of their hands.*)—We shall be back before you know it—and in some strange guise—I promise you——!

MARY (*nervously*): Don't say that, Percy—I hate you jesting about such things——!

WILLIAMS (*cheerfully moving off*): Adio!—Jane—Mary—Claire.—The Three Sisters watching their Lovers depart!——

TRELAWNY (*bluffly going off*): And I would be "Don Juan"!—If the authentic one was not waiting for us at Leghorn!—Buona notte, Signore!——

MARY, JANE, CLAIRE: Buona notte, Signori, Ritornate tosto! . . .

SHELLEY (*calling back, quoting semi-jocularly*): "Fare thee well, and if forever, Then forever Fare thee well. . . ."

[The Women stand waving Goodbye to them on the Terrace, as SHELLEY, WILLIAMS, and TRELAWNY go off Back towards the Sea, waving and calling "Farewell" as they go.—While the Curtain descends, as SHELLEY's voice is still heard declaiming BYRON's famous lines, in the distance.

CURTAIN.

ACT FIVE

SCENE II

THE SALON OF BYRON'S PALAZZO
LANFRANCHI AT PISA, JULY, 1822.
LATE AFTERNOON

BYRON *is reclining on a Sofa in a dressing-gown, writing "Don Juan," and sipping gin-and-water. His Bull-dog, Moretto, suddenly barks, as Voices and Footsteps are heard outside, the Door opening, and SHELLEY suddenly bursting in.*

BYRON (*irritably*): Who's there? . . . What do you want? . . . Who's that? . . .

SHELLEY (*excitedly*): It is I, Shelley—straight from Leghorn. . . . And look whom I've brought with me! . . . No less than Hunt and Marianne themselves, arrived at last, after leaving Plymouth months ago! . . .

[LEIGH HUNT and MARIANNE HUNT then enter, followed by Four dirty, unkempt Children clinging to her skirts. BYRON regards them nonchalantly, bowing casually from his Sofa, without rising.]

BYRON (*sarcastically*): So you've come at length! . . . We began to think you had been storm-bound permanently.—

HUNT (*fulsomely*): So we thought ourselves—having left London eight months ago, and being delayed at Ramsgate, Dartmouth, and Plymouth, by weather and Marianne's illness, until I despaired of ever reaching you at all!—

SHELLEY (*delightedly*) : But now you are here, a thousand welcomes to divine Italy ! . . . I am so inexpressibly glad to see you, my dear fellow—I cannot tell you how delighted !—

HUNT (*looking him up and down*) : And I to see you, my dear Shelley.—You have not changed at all—except to grow in manly vigour, perhaps—— !

BYRON (*superiorly*) : That is the effect of Riding and Shooting with me, Hunt.—We are not only Poets and Dreamers out here, as you Critics sometimes imagine—but Sportsmen, and Men of Action !

HUNT (*appraisingly*) : So I see.—And although your hair is sprinkled with grey, Shelley, your Chest seems of larger girth, and your Voice is stronger—more confident and downright.—

SHELLEY (*cheerfully*) : That is the result of making all arrangements here for you, and Marianne, and the Children ! . . . Byron has very kindly lent you the whole of the ground floor of the Palazzo——

BYRON (*grudgingly*) : And Shelley and Mary have furnished it,—so I hope you will find it pleasant and comfortable.

MRS. HUNT (*looking round sniffily*) : If it is anything like this, I am afraid the children will quickly disfigure the walls——

THORNTON HUNT (*triumphantly*) : That we will, Mamma ! . . .

[*The Children begin running wildly round the Room.*]

BYRON (*haughtily*) : I trust not, Mrs. Hunt, as I have gone to some trouble and expense to have them newly painted for you.

MRS. HUNT (*retortingly*) : Come here, at once, Children ! But you can't expect them not to amuse themselves—even if they are in the palace of a Poet—and a Peer of the Realm ! . . .

BYRON (*feelingly*) : Unfortunately, I am accus-

tomed to clean and dainty Children—like my little Allegra—and not to a tribe of dirty and mischievous little Yahoos !——

MRS. HUNT (*blubbing*) : If we are going to be insulted, my dears, I think we had better retire to our own quarters. . . . I am feeling very ill, and shall soon be spitting blood again ! . . .

SHELLEY (*solicitously*) : I have sent Trelawny to fetch Dr. Vacca for you,—and Williams will show you to your rooms, while we make—Hunt at home here——

MRS. HUNT (*dignifiedly*) : Thank you—Mr. Williams is attending to our baggage outside—I will join him at once.—Come along, children.

CHILDREN (*in chorus*) : Yes, Mamma.

[*They all make for the Doorway noisily.*]

BYRON (*aside to SHELLEY*) : By the way, Shelley, Trelawny has been speaking against my morals.—What do you think of that?——

MRS. HUNT (*tartly, overhearing as she goes out*) : It is the first time that *I* ever heard of them !—This way, children !——

[BYRON scowls as she goes out with the noisy CHILDREN.]

BYRON (*aside to SHELLEY*) : What a woman !—Have a drink, Hunt.—You must need it with that kraal of Hottentots ! . . .

[*Pouring him out one.*]

HUNT (*gratefully*) : Thanks.—It has been a trying trip, what with the Children's Measles, Scarlet Fever, Convulsions, and Storms without——

BYRON (*interrupting*) : And within, I should imagine—No wonder I am an *un-married* man !

SHELLEY (*anxiously*) : But you are looking paler and weaker than when I last saw you in London, Hunt?——

HUNT (*humorously*) : I know—I have become an elderly Gentleman, with sunken cheeks, and

temples that throb at the least touch of emotion—such as seeing you—my dear Shelley !——

SHELLEY (*rapturously*) : I have a thousand things to discuss and see with you—— But first we must arrange business with Byron. (*To BYRON.*) How soon can we start collaborating over *The Liberal* ?——

BYRON (*laconically*) : Unfortunately, a brawl at my Villa at Monte Nero last night, gave the Government the opportunity of banishing Count Gamba and the Guicciolis from Tuscany—— !

SHELLEY (*surprised*) : Oh, Byron, I am distressed to hear that—so your plans will be upset ?——

BYRON (*casually*) : I fear so—I may instantly quit the country for South America—or Switzerland, as I have been contemplating for some time past——

SHELLEY (*aghast*) : But then what is to become of the Hunts ?—and the projected Journal ? . . .

BYRON (*smoking imperturbably*) : That is Mr. Hunt's affair entirely.—He has come out here at his own risk, and must make his own arrangements.

HUNT (*taken aback*) : But I understood it was *your* suggestion at Ravenna that I should come to Italy, and collaborate with you and Shelley in this periodical ?——

BYRON (*retorting*) : But not that we should finance and keep you indefinitely—although no doubt Shelley has already helped with your fare ?

HUNT (*warmly*) : He has certainly lent me £150 for the trip, so that my Children should not starve.—But I shall repay that—with interest—the moment the Journal is published——

BYRON (*sarcastically*) : At my expense.—Really, Hunt, in the affairs of this World you resemble your own children !—What do you propose to print in this precious Journal, anyway ?——

HUNT (*heavily*) : Political and Literary opinion for the Liberal cause—such as the “Quarterly” has produced for the Richards——

SHELLEY (*enthusiastically*) : If a band of staunch Reformers such as us—resolute yet skilful infidels—were united in as close a league as them, there is nothing we could not do !——

HUNT (*classically*) : We could divide the World between us !—like the Triumvirate—and you could be the sleeping partner,—if you ~~would~~, Shelley—only it would be with a Cleopatra,—and your dreams would be worth the giving of kingdoms—— !

BYRON (*cynically*) : While I should be merely the Banker on whom you drew when funds ran out ! . . . No, no, Hunt, I may be a Spendthrift, but I am not quite such a generous one as that ! . . .

HUNT (*desperately*) : Then what are we to do ? . . . Who is going to pay for our Food and Doctors’ bills ? . . . for Marianne and the Children are always ailing. . . .

BYRON (*unkindly*) : You should have thought of that before you left England.—Surely you made some arrangements for the receipt of a regular income from the “Examiner,” to be sent to you here ?——

HUNT : My Brother and Joint-Partner has been cast into prison, as you know, for saying the House of Commons consisted of public Criminals rather than public Guardians——

BYRON (*shrewdly*) : Quite right too !—But it was tactless of him to put it into print.—And you ought not to have left home without the assurance of payment of this.

HUNT (*pathetically*) : I have been so racked with illness that I have been unable to contribute anything for the last six months.——

SHELLEY (*encouragingly*) : But once you are in this divine Italy you will recover—I will help

you—I am full of thought and plans—and together we will all do something tremendous——!

BYRON (*admiringly*): Shelley! . . . You are a bugbear to me and to the World!—But you are to my knowledge the least selfish and the mildest of men.—A man who has made more sacrifices of his fortunes and feelings for others, than any I have ever known! . . .

SHELLEY (*beseechingly*): Then join with Hunt and me in starting this Journal as you promised?—We will liberate the world with our views, and make a new Heaven and a new Earth! . . .

BYRON (*bitterly*): And probably find ourselves in jail for our pains! . . . You are a bright-eyed snake to tempt me, Shelley! . . . But you alone,—in this age of humbug,—dare to stem the current—as you have often done in your skiff on the Arno.—And although I cannot see that you make any progress—the attempt is better than being swept along,—as all the rest are,—with the filthy garbage scoured from its Banks! . . .

SHELLEY (*hopefully*): Then you *will* do something *definitely*? . . . You will make Hunt an offer? . . .

BYRON (*magnanimously*): For *your* sake—Yes!—And if I settle at Lucca, Hunt shall have the copyright of “The Vision of Judgement” for the first Number. . . .

HUNT (*emotionally*): How can I thank you? . . . What can I say? . . . I am overcome with emotion. . . .

SHELLEY (*surprised and grateful*): That is generous of you, Byron, and I am pleasantly surprised—as I feared our alliances would never succeed.—

BYRON (*grudgingly*): It is for *your* sake—and no one else’s—that I am doing it, Shelley. . . .

SHELLEY (*discerningly*): Not for your own? . . .

For I am merely the Link between two Thunderbolts.—And how long the Wren and Eagle will continue together, I dare not prophesy !—

BYRON (*anxiously*) : You are right, Shelley.—But meanwhile I trust you are going to make yourself at home here, and stay a few days to settle the Hunts in ? . . . Before I decide to move myself.—

SHELLEY (*sadly*) : I fear not, Byron.—For as soon as I have arranged matters with ~~you~~, I must return at once with Williams to Mary and Jane—and Claire.—

BYRON (*scowlingly*) : Claire ! . . . Is she still with you ?—How can you tolerate that abominable Girl for so long ? . . .

SHELLEY (*pointedly*) : She must have a roof somewhere.—And you have thrown her on the World.—

BYRON (*violently*) : She can go to the Devil if she likes !—So long as she doesn't bombard my doorstep with her Scenes and Tantrums ! . . .

SHELLEY (*gently*) : She sent you a Message, Byron, which I undertook to give you—regarding Allegra—and the disposal of her little Body. . .

BYRON (*coldly*) : I have made all arrangements, and am having it embalmed and sent to Harrow immediately.—

SHELLEY (*beggingly*) : Claire begged that she might have a last glimpse of it before it went.—

BYRON (*finally*) : That is impossible.—It has already been dispatched.—

SHELLEY : Then a Lock of Hair, at least, to put in a Miniature ? . . .

BYRON (*irritably*) : I will do what I can about that.—But these women are infuriating with their constant demands and requests.—

SHELLEY (*remonstrating*) : You have some duty towards her, Byron . . . and if you could see the pitiable state she is in, even your heart would melt. . . .

BYRON (*cynically*) : If it had done so as often as she wished, I would have none left, my dear Shelley !——

[WILLIAMS *enters carrying Books of LEIGH HUNT's. A Storm is heard getting up, meanwhile, through the Doorway.*

WILLIAMS (*to HUNT*) : I've brought you some of these, as I thought you might be wanting them—having settled Mrs. Hunt and the Children downstairs.

HUNT (*gratefully*) : Ah ! my beloved Books !—Thank you, Williams ;—I brought some especially for Shelley, so he can gorge himself with them to his heart's delight !——

SHELLEY (*seizing some from WILLIAMS*) : Give them to me !—I shall now immune myself like a Spider in his Web, and weave my Verse around them ! . . .

WILLIAMS (*severely*) : You will do nothing of the kind, Shelley.—We must start off for Leghorn at once, if we are going to sail to Lerici tomorrow——

BYRON (*interposing*) : But not tonight ! . . . Surely you are not leaving us tonight, Shelley ?

HUNT (*dismayed*) : When I have only just arrived, and we have a thousand things to discuss ?—and a hundred sights to see ? . . .

SHELLEY : We saw some of them this morning, when we enjoyed the frescoes in the Campo Santo, and the pealing organ in the Duomo.—And I shall return again shortly, with Mary, to show you the rest.——

BYRON (*anxiously*) : But you cannot go tonight !—It is far too wild and stormy—— !

WILLIAMS (*determinedly*) : But I promised Jane I would return tomorrow at latest.—And if Shelley won't sail in the "Ariel", I shall hire a felucca and go by myself——

BYRON (*contemptuously*) : Oh ! these faithful Husbands !—I can't compete with them !—Never having been one myself ! . . .

[*The Door opens again, and TRELAWNY enters, taking off his Hat and Cloak.*

BYRON (*greeting him with relief*) : Ah, Trelawny, you have just arrived in time, to prevent these Maniacs leaving for Leghorn tonight !

TRELAWNY (*brusquely*) : Tonight ?—Impossible.—The Weather is breaking fast—I have just returned from fetching Dr. Vacca to see Mrs. Hunt—and it looks as though a bad Storm was brewing.

HUNT (*gratefully to TRELAWNY*) : Thank you for getting him, my dear fellow—I must go down at once, and see what he says of her condition.—

TRELAWNY (*seriously*) : He seemed to take a grave view when I left him—and spoke of a Decline caused by the Hæmorrhage. . . .

BYRON (*cynically*) : Which means she will probably outlive us all !—Physicians are paid to frighten us, or we would think we weren't getting our money's worth !

SHELLEY : Cynical as ever, Byron,—but I trust not correct !—

WILLIAMS (*impatiently*) : Shelley, we must start at once.—Otherwise we shall miss the early tide to Lerici tomorrow—

SHELLEY (*rising quickly*) : I will come immediately, Edward, when I have said goodbye to Hunt and Byron—

BYRON (*reluctantly*) : If you are really determined to start out on a night like this, Trelawny shall go with you,—as I want him to take the “Bolivar” round to Genoa as soon as possible.

TRELAWNY (*agreeing instantly*) : Very well then, and I will arrange for it to be taken on to Genoa.—And try to persuade Shelley not to sail, if the weather looks dangerous.

HUNT (*anxiously*) : Swear to me that you will not, Shelley—unless this storm has abated ? . . . After those awful weeks tossing in the “David

Walter," I shudder to think of you in that frail little "Ariel," exposed to these frightful tempests . . . !

SHELLEY (*debonairly*) : Never fear, Hunt, with Sailors such as Williams, Charles Vivian and myself, we can combat the worst of the elements !

TRELAWNY (*contemptuously*) : You, a Sailor !—You will do no good until you heave your books and papers overboard, shear the wisps of hair from your eyes, and plunge your arms in a tar-bucket !

SHELLEY (*determinedly*) : But I will—I should like to be a sailor—only you say I never can be—— !

WILLIAMS : Why not ?——

TRELAWNY (*bluntly*) : Because he does not Smoke, Drink, or Swear—and those are each essential qualifications for a Sailor !

BYRON (*sensibly*) : My principal objection is that you can't Swim.—If your Boat capsized, you would go down like a rat in the hold——

SHELLEY (*jokingly*) : Or the Pig-ballast in the bottom !—I should not attempt to save myself anyway, for fear of dragging others down.—But in any case, if I died tomorrow, I should have lived to be older than my Father—I feel ninety at least.—Goodbye, Hunt.—Remember me to Marianne.—And may I take this copy of Keats to read on the journey ? . . .

HUNT (*gladly*) : Of course.—And keep it till you give it to me with your own hands.——

SHELLEY (*cheerfully*) : I will—and I trust it will be shortly.—When we are all re-united once again.——

BYRON (*shaking his hand*) : Goodbye, Shelley, and remember you are a Poet—not a Sailor!——

SHELLEY (*confidently*) : I shall become one—in Williams' hands, never fear.—Goodbye,—until we meet again.——

[*Going to Door.*

TRELAWNY (*quoting*) : " In thunder, lightning, or in rain ? " . . .

WILLIAMS (*looking out impatiently*) : The Post-Chaise is at the Door.—We must go at once—if you are to have time to go to your Bankers at Leghorn in the morning——?

SHELLEY (*putting on his coat hurriedly*) : Which is most important, as I have to get *Scudi* for the whole household, and other purchases which Mary has commissioned me to do.

BYRON (*insistent*) : Then Farewell, my dear Shelley.—But swear not to sail unless the weather be more settled ? — —

SHELLEY : I never swear—so Farewell, Byron.—Farewell, my dear Hunt ——— (*Taking his hand.*)

HUNT (*anxiously*) : Farewell, Shelley.—And write to us when you have arrived safely, for we shall be anxious.—Farewell . . . my dear Friend.

[SHELLEY, WILLIAMS, and TRELAWNY go out together. The Post-Chaise is heard driving off, while BYRON and HUNT watch them from a Window.]

BYRON (*nervously*) : I trust they arrive safely.—But I have an uneasy feeling about it——

HUNT (*resignedly*) : So have I.—But I pray Trelawny will not let them sail if the Weather has not improved.—Now I must go at once, and see poor Marianne and the Children.—

BYRON (*irritably*) : I will not offer to accompany you.—In fact, I will place Moretto at the Door, to see that none of your little Cockneys pass !—as it is essential for " Don Juan " that he has no interruption !——

HUNT (*sarcastically*) : I quite understand—and I assure you they shall not disturb you—or your midnight Beverage—— !

[*Looking meaningly at the gin-and-water* LEIGH HUNT goes out angrily.]

BYRON (*murmuring to himself*) : So long as none of your Hottentot kraal molest me I shall be content. (*Crossing to Window.*) I can't do with

these Cockneys.—Shelley is different, half fire and spirit.—If he hadn't left me I might be able to write.—But as it is, I have an uneasy feeling of far-off, prescient things—as though the Gods made fun of us—and “killed us for their sport”! . . .

[As BYRON mutters to himself, the Storm increases with lightning, thunder, and the distant roar of the seas, as He continues looking out anxiously, and the Stage ~~darkens~~ as He draws the Curtains, and goes back to the Sofa, settling down to rest, with a MS. and quill beside him. As He is deep in meditation, a dim FIGURE quietly glides into the room, standing behind his couch, with Its reflection in the gilt Italian Mirror on the opposite Wall in front of BYRON.

BYRON (*starting up, terrified*) : Who's there ? . . . What's that ? . . . Who are you ? . . . Speak ! . . .

VISION OF SHELLEY (*softly*) : It is only I—Shelley—I have come back . . . to talk with you—

BYRON (*amazed*) : But you went—only a short time ago—to Pisa and Lerici ?—

VISION OF SHELLEY (*monotonously*) : I know. . . . But I have come back. . . . Because I am cold and wet. . . . I want shelter and warmth . . . from the cold, cold waves. . . .

BYRON (*turning to look at the APPARITION, and seeing a pale, white VISION of SHELLEY*) : You look so pale and melancholy.—What can I do for you ?—Sit down and eat.—You look ill and tired—

VISION OF SHELLEY (*motionless*) : I am ill . . . and very—very tired. . . . But I cannot eat. . . . I shall never eat again. . . .

BYRON (*mystified*) : Why ?—Why ?—In Heaven's name, what is the matter, Shelley ?—

VISION OF SHELLEY (*melancholy*) : I have not a soldo left in the world. . . . I shall never eat nor drink again. . . .

BYRON (*haughtily*) : But this is not an Inn.—What nonsense !—You need not pay here !—

VISION OF SHELLEY (*dreamily*) : Perhaps . . . it is the worse for that ! . . .

BYRON (*coaxingly*) : Come, Come.—Sit down and refresh yourself.—You are worn out with fatigue and emotion—

VISION OF SHELLEY (*mournfully*) : No. . . . No. . . . I must go to Pisa and Lericci. . . . But I will meet you in a month's time at Via Re^{gio} . . . on the Sea-shore. . . .

BYRON (*taken aback*) : In a month's time ?—But I hope to see you long before that—at the Casa Magni, at Spezzia—next week ?—

VISION OF SHELLEY (*wearily*) : But you will not. . . . I have much to do. . . . And the time is not yet. . . . I will meet you on the coast of Lucca. . . . But you will not recognize me. . . .

BYRON (*mockingly*) : Not recognise you ?—Who could fail to recognise that Stoop—and Lock of Hair— !

VISION OF SHELLEY (*prophetically*) : Not when it is Ashes . . . and a Heap of Dust. . . .

[*Swiftly the VISION disappears, as the VOICE trails away into thin air, and BYRON starts up.*

BYRON (*rushing to Door after It*) : Shelley ! . . . Shelley ! . . . Come back.—Come back.—Where are you ? . . . What does it mean ? . . . What does it mean ? . . .

[*For answer there is a loud clap of thunder, lightning, and a torrential storm breaks against the Windows, as BYRON draws the Curtains, and gazes out in agonized terror, as*

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT FIVE

SCENE III

THE TERRACE OF THE CASA MAGNI
OVERLOOKING THE BAY OF LERICI,
AT NIGHT A WEEK LATER, JULY,
1822

[MARY, CLAIRE, and JANE WILLIAMS are standing on the Terrace watching for the "Ariel" to come into Harbour. It is a broiling Summer evening, and from below on the Sea-shore come the Songs and cries of the Genoese Natives, celebrating their Festa with Dances and Songs.]

MARY (*irritably*) : How stifling hot it is ! . . . I shall scream if those Natives make that noise all night with their horrible songs and dances ! . . .

JANE : They are celebrating their Festa, I suppose.—They kept me awake most of last night.

CLAIRE (*wearily*) : I couldn't sleep anyway.—But they don't exactly add to the merriment of the scene, do they ?

MARY (*passionately*) : I hate them.—I hate the whole place—and am oppressed with wretchedness—in spite of gazing on the most beautiful scene in the World.

JANE (*gazing out admiringly*) : But we can't all live on Scenery—like Shelley can—— How He would love it if He were here !—the splash and colour of their costumes on the shore, and the wildness of the whole place.—

MARY (*sharply*) : Don't talk about Him—I can't bear it.—If only it would rain !—Or even the Sirocco would blow !—

JANE : They are praying for Rain at Lerici, there are processions of Priests and Religiosi all the time—so the Servants tell me.

CLAIRE (*cryptically*) : As though that can do any good !—The noise they are making would prevent any God from even hearing their prayers !

MARY : They always do that on these Festas—like wild Savages—the Men, Women, and Children in different Bands—dancing all night on the sands—into the sea—then back again—screaming that one detestable Air.—Oh, how I hate it ! . . .

JANE (*soothingly*) : Then don't listen to it, my dear.—Go in, and do some reading or writing—and forget it.

MARY (*nervously*) : But I can't.—It's in my ears all the time—like the Sea—I can't shut it out—while there's this awful uncertainty. . . .

CLAIRE (*consolingly*) : You *must* calm yourself, Mary.—If there was anything wrong we should have heard by now.—

MARY (*stubbornly*) : But they were to leave Leghorn on Monday at latest.—We know that from Edward's letter to you, don't we, Jane ? . . . Read it to us again to make sure.—

JANE (*taking the letter out of her Bodice and reading*) : He says—" I am waiting at Leghorn for Shelley, who is with Byron and Leigh Hunt at Pisa. If he should not come by Monday, I will come in a Felucca, and you may expect me on Thursday evening at latest. . . ."

MARY (*mournfully*) : And tonight is Thursday—

CLAIRE (*hopefully*) : But Shelley may not have arrived at Leghorn in time to sail on Monday.—He may have been delayed at Pisa with the

Leigh Hunts—and making arrangements with Byron about Allegra. . . .

JANE (*determinedly*) : I pray so.—But if we have no news—nor see no sail by tonight—I shall go to Leghorn tomorrow to see what has happened.

MARY (*making up her mind*) : And I will come with you—I cannot bear this awful suspense another day—

CLAIRE (*anxiously*) : But, Mary, you aren't fit to ~~travel~~ after your Miscarriage!—You can't undertake such a journey in your present state.—It would be madness.—Shelley would never approve of it.

MARY (*firmly*) : Shelley is not here to stop me—and I *must* go to him.—My Strength is returning for it—

CLAIRE : But not your Calmness or Serenity, Mary.—Where has all that gone? . . .

MARY (*morbidly*) : Into the heat, perhaps—I am always like this in the Summer, I find—for it was then that little William died—that awful summer at Rome—and now another has come with excessive heat.—And I keep wondering if little Percy's life is more secure than his! . . .

JANE (*tartly*) : Oh, don't be morbid, Mary.—Why worry about the Child, who is perfectly well and healthy?—When we are so uncertain about Edward and Shelley themselves—

MARY (*hopefully*) : Ah! . . . when *He* returns—when my Shelley comes back—I shall be happy and calm then—for He will comfort me, even if my Boy is ill.—He will restore him, and encourage me—

CLAIRE (*eagerly*) : They may be ill themselves.—That may be the cause of the delay—or some disagreeable news about the Hunts—who knows?—

MARY (*agreeing*) : That is true—Marianne and the Children may be troublesome—as they

always are.—And Shelley *may* be having difficulties with Byron about starting the new Journal with Hunt.

CLAIRE (*shrewdly*) : I don't believe Byron means to start it himself—I think poor Hunt has come out on a Wild Goose chase, as everyone always does with Albé.

MARY (*rebukingly*) : Don't be bitter, Claire—remember Byron is more a Poet than a Gentleman. . . . And if he thinks the Journal ~~would~~ be a success he would do it.

CLAIRE (*rushing to Window Back as she sees a Sail*) : Look ! . . . There is a Felucca coming ashore now.—There !—And a native jumping out with the mail bag, I think !—I'll run out and meet him, and see if there's any news for us—

[*She rushes out Back before they can stop her.*]

MARY (*nervously*) : I wish I could stop her.—But Claire is so impetuous—and I don't want her to have more bad news, after all she has been through over Allegra. . . .

JANE (*curiously*) : Then you are prepared for bad news, Mary ? . . . But why are you so morbid ? . . .

MARY (*resignedly*) : I am always prepared for anything with Shelley.—And I have had awful Presentiments lately, as you know—and horrors always seem to occur to us in the Summer, when the World is at its loveliest.—But I am hoping that for once my intuitions are wrong.

JANE (*excitedly*) : I pray so too.—Look, Claire is returning !—And she has a letter in her hand !—So they must be all right, thank Heavens !—

MARY (*desperately*) : Oh, I pray so—I pray so ! . . .

[CLAIRE *enters with a Letter slowly, but her face is set and frightened. She goes up to JANE, not daring to face MARY.*]

CLAIRE (*slowly*) : There is a letter for Shelley from Hunt—posted from Leghorn on Tuesday—

MARY (*snatching it from her*) : Here—let me read it—give it to me—quickly——

CLAIRE (*fearfully*) : No—no—let Jane read it first—please, please Mary——

MARY (*determinedly*) : Certainly not.—If it's for Shelley, *I* should be the first to read it.—Give it to me at once——

JANE (*impatiently*) : Open it.—Open it quickly—and let us know the worst !——

[MARY *tears it open with trembling fingers.*

MARY (*reading*) : “ Dear Shelley—Pray write to tell us how you got home, for they say that you had bad weather after you sailed on Monday, and we are anxious. . . .”

[*The paper falls from MARY'S hands, as she turns deathly white, and trembles violently. JANE picks it up off the floor frenziedly.*

JANE (*frantically*) : Let me read it—I must see it for myself. . . . (*Reads it again to herself, and turns deadly pale.*) Then it is all over, Mary. . . . Something terrible has happened !——

MARY (*rapidly*) : No, no, my dear Jane.—It is not all over.—But something must have happened,—and this suspense is dreadful.—We must do something at once.—We must go immediately.—Come with me.—We will sail to Leghorn tonight, if possible.—We must be brave and swift, and learn our fate at once. . . .

CLAIRE (*unselfishly*) : You must go to Byron at Pisa, for he will know what has happened.—But I cannot come.—He would not have me in the Palazzo, even at a time like this. . . .

MARY (*decidedly*) : No, you must stay and look after the Children.—We can't leave them alone with the Servants—and Jane and I will go post-haste to Byron and Hunt.—They must have news of some kind of the “ Ariel ”. . . .

JANE : Or Trelawny and Captain Roberts at Leghorn.—They may have been the last to see them before they sailed.—

MARY (*longingly*) : Trelawny ! . . . If only he were here now ! . . . How he would comfort and support us.

CLAIRE (*sensibly*) : I feel sure he will come to us the instant he has any news.—But if they really sailed from Leghorn on Monday, he will know no more than anyone else.

JANE (*recollecting*) : That was the Night of the terrific Thunderstorm here—do you remember, Mary ? . . . We pitied any small boat ~~which~~ was out at sea that Night !—

MARY (*horror-stricken*) : But we never dreamt they would start in such weather.—We had watched it coming up all day.—It was obvious there was going to be a Tempest.—It would have been madness to go out before it—

CLAIRE (*logically*) : But it may have got up more suddenly at Leghorn.—They might have sailed before it started—and been caught in it between there and Spezzia.

JANE (*hopefully*) : But we would have heard if there had been any Accident or Shipwreck—the News would have spread like wild-fire—You know what gossips these natives are !—

CLAIRE : And they have a queer system of Communication—almost like 'Telepathy' through the air.—Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could communicate with Shelley and Edward like that ? . . .

MARY (*dreamily*) : I sometimes almost feel we can.—Perhaps that is why I've been so terribly depressed.—Perhaps they have been trying to tell us something—but can't quite get through—

JANE (*matter-of-factly*) : Nonsense, Mary.—If anything had been found on the coast, Trelawny would have returned at once to tell us—as you say yourself.

CLAIRE (*looking out through a Telescope*) : But look !—What do I see there ? . . .

JANE and MARY (*gazing out through the Telescope*) : Where ? . . . where ? . . . Show us where ? . . .

CLAIRE (*pointing out to Sea*) : There—in the curve of the Bay—to the right of that tree.—A Sail on the horizon—can it be ? . . . Is it by any chance—

MARY (*interrupting*) : The “Ariel” ! . . . Oh, Claire, don’t raise our hopes like this if it’s not true—my heart won’t stand it ! . . .

JANE (*dejectedly*) : No, Mary, no.—It is the “Bolivar”.—I recognise her even from this distance.—She has bigger sails, and is more seaworthy looking, than the little “Ariel”.

CLAIRE (*hopefully*) : But Shelley and Edward may be on board her all the same.—The “Bolivar” might have picked them up out at sea—who knows ? . . .

MARY (*feverishly*) : Look—they are putting into the Shore—we shall know in a few moments—

CLAIRE (*gazing through the Telescope*) : They are letting down a small Boat from the side now.—Some men are getting into it.—But it is too far out for me to distinguish them.—

JANE (*excitedly looking out*) : I see three or four distinctly—so they may be among them—rowing towards the shore now—

MARY (*drying her eyes*) : My eyes are too blinded to see.—Tell me quickly who they are as soon as you recognise them—

CLAIRE (*looking through the Telescope*) : I can’t distinguish clearly yet.—They are only just landing.—But I think I see Captain Roberts and some Sailors, and—and—

MARY (*breathlessly*) : Not Shelley ? . . .

JANE (*likewise*) : Or Edward ? . . .

CLAIRE (*slowly*) : I can scarcely see.—But I fear not.—I think I see Trelawny alone—getting out of the boat.—But I may be mistaken.—

JANE (*desperately*) : Pray Heaven you are.—But I hardly dare hope—

MARY (*hopefully*) : Perhaps he has come with news of them, however—at least our terrible suspense may be over. . . .

CLAIRE (*faintly*) : Or our worst fears confirmed—

JANE (*frantically*) : But anything would be better than this ghastly uncertainty—I can't bear it a moment longer. . . .

MARY (*bravely*) : Nor I—and yet while we're uncertain we can still hope—

CLAIRE (*excitedly*) : Yes.—It is Trelawny.—He is coming up the steps now.—But there is no one else with him—no one—

JANE (*hopefully*) : Perhaps he has left them behind.—They may have returned to Leghorn.—Or be stranded along the Coast. . . .

[TRELAWNY comes in, looking pale and agitated. He stands for a moment in the Doorway Stage Back, unable to speak, while THEY surmise from his emotion that the worst has happened.]

MARY (*desperately*) : Trelawny ! . . . What have you come to tell us ? . . . (*He does not answer.*) Is it all over, then ? . . .

[*He bows his head silently.*]

TRELAWNY (*brokenly*) : Yes—I came to tell you that . . .

JANE (*frenziedly*) : But when did it happen ? . . . How ? . . . When ? . . . Where ? . . . Oh ! tell us quickly all that you know.—Put us out of our agony at once. . . .

TRELAWNY (*monotonously*) : They sailed from Leghorn on Monday at 3 p.m.—instead of 3 or 4 a.m. as they should have done. It was oppressively hot—there was not a breath of air in the Harbour.—My Genoese Mate said to me, “ They are standing too much in shore—the current will set them there.” “ They will soon have the Land-breeze,” I replied. “ Maybe,” he continued. “ But she will soon have too much breeze ; that gaff-top-sail is foolish in a Boat

with no deck and no Sailor on board." Then, pointing to the South West, he said, "Look at those black lines, and the dirty rags hanging on them out of the sky—they are a warning; look at the smoke on the water; the devil is brewing mischief."-----

CLAIRE (*breathlessly*) : And my God, He was ! . . . What happened then, Tre ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*desperately*) : There was a Sea-fog, in which their Boat was soon after enveloped—and we saw nothing more of her—

MARY (*agonisingly*) : Then how do you know what happened ? . . . How can you be certain ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*heavily*) : I can't—the heaviness of the atmosphere and an unwonted stillness benumbed my senses.—I went down into the Cabin, and sank into a slumber—

JANE (*amazed*) : How could you have slept at such a time ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*wryly*) : You were never a Sailor, Jane, otherwise you would know Sailors can sleep through anything !—

MARY (*softly*) : Even Death itself—

TRELAWNY (*gently*) : Yes, Mary—I was roused up by a noise overhead, and went on deck.—The Men were letting go a chain cable to let go another anchor.—There was a general stir amongst the shipping; shifting berths, getting down yards and masts, veering out cables, hauling in of hawsers, letting go anchors, hailing from the ships and quays, boats sculling rapidly to and fro. . . . It was almost dark, although only half-past six o'clock—

CLAIRE (*recollecting*) : We were sitting here quietly then, I remember, on the terrace here, watching the storm get up—

JANE (*reminiscently*) : And I was writing to Shelley, "Are you going to join your friend Plato ? . . . or do you expect I shall do so soon ? . . ."

TRELAWNY (*continuing monotonously*) : The Sea was of the colour of lead, and covered with an oily scum.—Gusts of wind swept over without ruffling it, and big drops of rain fell on its surface.—There was a commotion in the air, made up of many threatening sounds, coming upon us from the sea.—Fishing-craft and coasting vessels under bare poles rushed by us in shoals, running foul of the Ships in the Harbour.—As yet the din and hubbub was that made by Men, but their shrill pipings were suddenly silenced by the crashing voice of a thunder squall that burst right over our heads——

MARY (*piteously*) : One burst here too—— We thought the whole house would be swept away——

CLAIRE (*morbidly*) : As it may one of these days —But what happened then, Tre? . . .

TRELAWNY (*continuing*) : For some time no other sounds were to be heard than the thunder, wind and rain.—When the fury of the storm, which did not last for more than twenty minutes, had abated, and the horizon was in some degree cleared, I looked to seaward anxiously, in the hope of seeing Shelley's Boat amongst the many small craft scattered about——

JANE (*anxiously*) : And did you? . . . Was there no sign? . . .

TRELAWNY (*gloomily*) : None—I watched every speck that loomed on the horizon, thinking that they would have borne up on their return to port, as all the other Boats that had gone out in the same direction had done——

MARY (*desperately*) : And there was nothing? . . . nothing? . . . not a speck or spar? . . .

TRELAWNY (*hopelessly*) : Nothing—not a sign in any direction——

CLAIRE (*timidly*) : What did you do then? . . .

TRELAWNY (*morosely*) : I sent our Genoese Mate

on board some of the returning Craft to make enquiries, but they all professed not to have seen the English Boat——

MARY (*hoping against hope*) : I wonder if they were lying—for, as we know, the quarantine laws are so strict that if you render assistance to a vessel in distress, or rescue a drowning stranger, you are condemned to a long and rigorous quarantine of fourteen days or more, on returning to port.——

TRELAWNY (*hopelessly*) : They may have been lying—but I fear not.—In any case, I did not leave the “Bolivar” till dark.—During the night it was gusty and showery, and the lightning flashed along the coast——

JANE (*fearfully*) : I know—it woke me, and I could not sleep—I got up at five, and from the Terrace saw—or dreamt I saw—the “Bolivar” opposite in the offing ! . . .

MARY (*amazed*) : Jane ! . . . You never told me ! . . . How amazing ! . . . What did she do then ? . . .

JANE (*uncertainly*) : She hoisted more sail, and went through the Straits—I knew not what it could mean.—Hope and Uncertainty had made such a chaos in my mind—I knew not what to think——

TRELAWNY (*continuing*) : Meanwhile, we were still at Leghorn.—At daylight I returned on board, and resumed my examinations of the Crews of the various Boats which had returned to Port during the Night.

CLAIRE : Did they know anything ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*melancholy*) : They either knew nothing or would say nothing.—But my Genoese pointed out, on board a fishing-boat, an English-made oar that he thought he had seen in Shelley’s boat.—But the entire Crew swore by all the Saints in the Calendar that this was not so.——

MARY (*hopefully*) : It sounds as though they were lying.—They are terrified of these quarantine laws, so that even if one Vessel sees another in peril, or runs it down by accident, not a word is said or reported on the subject.—

TRELAWNY (*suspiciously*) : That is true—they are awful Rogues, and callous Wretches—and I have a horrid suspicion that one of those Feluccas which went out of Port at the same time may have run them down, when they saw them in danger——

JANE (*incredulously*) : But why should they ? . . . No one at Leghorn had any grudge against Edward or Shelley—who was the most friendly of all creatures——

TRELAWNY (*shrewdly*) : No, but they may have thought that Byron—the rich English Milord, was on board—and intended to rob him.

MARY (*ingenuously*) : But Shelley was always so poorly and shabbily dressed—they couldn't think he had any gold on him ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*meaningly*) : But remember he had just come from his Banker's with a canvas bag full of Tuscan crown pieces.—

CLAIRE (*aside, to Herself*) : The first he had got for many a long day——

TRELAWNY : And He, Edward, and I, could not be distinguished by the Sailors at the Harbour,—and both their Boats had their Sails loose, ready for Sea.—

MARY (*nervously*) : So you really think there may have been foul play ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*firmly*) : I am convinced of it—although I have no proof yet.—But I don't believe the "Ariel" merely capsized in that Storm.—She was much too sea-worthy and sturdy a little craft——

JANE (*hopefully*) : So you think there may still be hope of them being run down by these Brigands, possibly rescued, and held captive ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*desperately*) : I can't say.—It is a forlorn, fantastic hope, I fear.—But I clutch at it—as to the proverbial straw,—until we have direct evidence to the contrary. . . .

MARY (*appealingly*) : Oh, pray Heavens you are right !—But meanwhile, what have you done about trying to trace them? . . .

TRELAWNY (*depressingly*) : On the morning of the next day I rode to Pisa, where Byron had returned, to the Lanfranchi Palace.—I hoped to find a letter from you telling me of their safe arrival—but there was none. . . .

CLAIRE (*pathetically*) : While we were waiting anxiously for news from *you*—

TRELAWNY (*melancholy*) : I told my fears to Hunt,—and then went upstairs to Byron.—When I told him, his lip quivered, and his voice faltered, as he questioned me. . . .

CLAIRE (*bitterly*) : I have never seen him moved by anything.—But I believe Shelley meant more to him than any of us. . . .

TRELAWNY : I think you are right—I then sent a Courier to despatch the “Bolivar” to cruise along the Coast, while I mounted my Horse and rode in the same direction.—I also despatched a Courier along the Coast to go as far as Nice—

MARY (*desperately*) : And have they sent no News? . . . Have they found no trace? . . . All along the coast? . . .

TRELAWNY (*tragically*) : None.—But on my arrival at Via Reggio I heard that a punt, a water-keg, and some bottles had been found on the Beach.—

JANE (*pitifully*) : And you recognised them? . . .

TRELAWNY (*brokenly*) : I did—to my anguish—as having been in Shelley's Boat when he left Leghorn. . . .

MARY (*desperately*) : But nothing else? . . . You found nothing else at all? . . .

TRELAWNY (*wearily*) : Nothing—nothing else has been found up till now,—although I have patrolled the Shores with the Coastguard, stimulating them to keep a good look-out by the promise of a reward, and telling them to inform me here at once if anything else is found——

JANE (*pathetically*) : Nobody has been.—We had heard nothing till you arrived—except that they had sailed on Monday, which we did not believe—as it was stormy all day with a thunderstorm at night—until we received Hunt's letter to Shelley—written on Monday after they had sailed. . . .

TRELAWNY (*consolingly*) : They had a wonderful last day together in Pisa on Sunday,—visiting the Leaning Tower and listening to the pealing Organ in the Duomo.—Hunt said Shelley was looking better than he had ever seen him, and that they talked of a thousand things, and anticipated a hundred pleasures——

MARY (*reminiscently*) : He wrote to me saying how hurried and occupied he was with business over the Hunts, and Byron's offer to set them up with the Journal, on the copyright of "The Vision of Judgement" for the first number—which,—if sincere,—would set everything right.

TRELAWNY (*wearily*) : But he had not a moment's leisure, and was worn out with his exertions on their behalf.—He told Mrs. Hunt that if he should die tomorrow he had lived to be older than his father, as he felt ninety years of age——

CLAIRE (*affectionately*) : Poor Shelley.—He was always old and tired.—And yet younger and more enthusiastic than any of us.——

MARY (*enquiringly*) : Did he see Mrs. Mason before he left Pisa, do you know? . . .

TRELAWNY (*optimistically*) : Yes, and when he called to take leave of her, he seemed in better health and spirits than she had ever known him,

—his face sunburnt, and his heart light, because he had succeeded in making the poor Hunts tolerably comfortable, but . . .

MARY (*resignedly*) : But what? . . . Tell us, Tre? . . . We can bear anything now. . . .

TRELAWNY (*awfully*) : She told me that she had a strange Dream on Monday night—that Shelley came to her, looking very pale and melancholy—"You look ill and tired; sit down and eat," she said. "No," he replied, "I shall never eat more; I have not a soldo left in the world." . . .

MARY (*interposing*) : But he had just been to the Bank—

TRELAWNY (*sadly*) : I know—and Mrs. Mason answered, "Nonsense, this is no Inn; you need not pay." . . . "Perhaps," he replied. "It is the worse for that." . . . Then she awoke, crying bitterly . . . saying next day that she hoped "all was well with the Shelleys."—

CLAIRE (*piteously*) : Poor Mrs. Mason.—She is the kindest soul on earth,—and adored Shelley—as we all did. . . .

MARY (*hopefully*) : But Hope is not extinct, is it, Tre? . . . The Boat *may* have been blown to Corsica or Elba,—and, not knowing the Coast, they *may* have sailed still further, mayn't they? . . .

TRELAWNY (*forlornly*) : It is said that they have been seen in the Gulf—but I can hardly credit it.—However, I have sent a Courier from Tower to Tower along the Coast, to know if anything has been seen or found—

CLAIRE (*looking out again*) : There are some Sailors coming up from the shore now with Captain Roberts.—Perhaps they have some news for us. . . .

MARY (*fearfully*) : I pray so . . . and yet, I dread hearing anything—while there is nothing, I feel there is still hope—

JANE (*bravely*) : But we can't continue in this awful uncertainty for ever.—We must know one way or the other . . . sooner or later——

[CAPTAIN ROBERTS, a bluff old Mariner, and a Couple of Genoese SAILORS come up on to the Terrace, carrying a Book, a Boot, and a black silk Handkerchief. TRELAWNY turns to meet them, as They enter, baring their heads.

TRELAWNY (*hopefully*) : You have news, Roberts? . . . What have they found? . . .

CAPT. ROBERTS (*sorrowfully*) : This Book—and another—washed up with a tall, slight Body at Via Reggio—and this Boot and Kerchief with another Body—about three miles distant, near the tower of Migliarino, at the Bocca Lericcio.

TRELAWNY (*eagerly*) : Let me see the Book—— (*Taking it from ROBERTS.*) “Keats’ Poems.”—He borrowed it from Hunt the last thing at Pisa——

MARY (*longingly*) : Let me see it. (*Taking it from TRELAWNY.*) It is turned back at “The Eve of St. Agnes,” as though in the act of reading, and then thrust hastily away.—How did you find it, Sailors? . . .

[*They answer in Italian, and CAPT. ROBERTS translates.*

CAPT. ROBERTS (*slowly*) : They say in the jacket of his dress, with a Volume of Sophocles in the other pocket——

TRELAWNY (*hopelessly*) : He always carried that with him wherever he went—there can be no doubt, I fear. . . .

JANE (*desperately*) : And the Boot and Kerchief? . . . How did you find them? . . . (*Looking at them aghast.*)

CAPT. ROBERTS (*gently*) : On the Body, which was much more mutilated, I fear, Madam.—It had no other covering than the shreds of a shirt, and that partly drawn over the Head, as if the Wearer had been in the act of taking it off——

JANE (*insistently*) : And nothing else whatsoever? . . .

CAPT. ROBERTS (*holding up the Handkerchief*) : Yes—this black silk Handkerchief, tied sailor-fashion round the neck—

JANE (*passionately*) : Give it to me.—Let me see it for myself. (*Taking it from him.*) Yes—it is his—there is the E. E. W. which I worked for him myself.—But nothing else?—You found nothing else? . . .

CAPT. ROBERTS (*sadly*) : Only Socks—and this one Boot which they have brought, which shows that he had tried to strip to save himself—

TRELAWNY (*to JANE*) : Get one of Edward's to see if it matches. . . . But I fear that it does.—What state do they say the Bodies were in, Roberts? . . . (*Aside, as MARY and JANE are weeping over the relics.*)

CAPT. ROBERTS (*in a low voice*) : Badly mutilated—and the Face and Hands, and parts not protected by the Dress, were fleshless—the Flesh, Sinews, and Muscles hung about in rags—like this Shirt—exposing the Ribs and Bones—

TRELAWNY (*shuddering*) : Horrible! . . . What have they done with them meanwhile?—

CAPT. ROBERTS (*quickly*) : Buried them in quicklime in the Sands, according to the strict quarantine laws.

TRELAWNY (*rapidly*) : We must remove them at once—and give them a fitting burial and resting-place.—Mary—What arrangements would you like me to make? . . .

MARY (*distraughtly*) : I don't know—I can't think.—But I would like to get him away from that horrible Sea which has killed him—I always hated it—with every fibre of my Being! . . .

TRELAWNY (*softly*) : And he always loved it

so.—But where would you like to take him ? . . .

MARY (*brokenly*) : To Rome—beside his child—and Keats.—Where he said that such a place made one almost in love with Death. . . .

CLAPT. ROBERTS (*matter-of-factly*) : But you will not be allowed to disinter the Bodies, I fear, Madam.—The quarantine authorities are most adamant on that point.—

TRELAWNY (*thoughtfully*) : Then we shall have to think of some other means.—What if they were consumed by Fire upon the Sands, and only their Ashes preserved ? . . .

CLAPT. ROBERTS : All objections would then cease, I imagine.—

TRELAWNY (*turning to them*) : Mary—Jane—what do you think ? . . . What would they have said to Burial in the old Hellenic way ? . . .

MARY (*uncomprehendingly*) : How do you mean ? . . . What do you propose doing ? . . . I don't understand. . . .

TRELAWNY (*triumphantly*) : We will build a Pyre on the Shore—I will get a Furnace from Leghorn, of iron-bars and strong sheet-iron—and lay in a stock of fuel, and wine and oil, and frankincense and salt, such as were said to be used by Shelley's much-loved Hellenes on their funeral Pyres. . . .

JANE (*gently*) : And their precious Ashes. . . . What would you do with them ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*reverently*) : I should order two small Oak-Boxes—about the size of writing-desks—lined with black velvet, and a brass plate affixed to each, setting forth in Latin their Names, Ages, Country—and Fate—

MARY (*slowly*) : I think Shelley would have liked that.—He always said the Greeks knew how to Live and Die better than anyone.—But I couldn't bear to come and watch it myself. . . .

JANE (*shuddering*) : Neither could I . . . It would be more than I could bear. . . .

TRELAWNY (*understandingly*) : I understand that.—And there is no need to—I will arrange all myself.—And you and Mary could watch from a distance, if you desired.—Or leave it to me—and Byron—and Hunt—if you will trust us to do so ? . . .

MARY (*trustingly*) : I trust you entirely, Tre . . . and put the whole tragic ritual in your hands—

JANE (*likewise*) : And I too—knowing that Edward would prefer *you* to arrange it, rather than anyone else in the World. . . .

TRELAWNY (*determinedly*) : I will go at once, then, and make all arrangements. . . . While you, Roberts, I should like to go with my Sailors, and drag the bottom of the Sea off the coast of Via Reggio for the “Ariel”, to see if you can bring her up ?—

CAPT. ROBERTS (*dubiously*) : I will do my best, sir.—But it is a heavy job,—and may take me some time,—if she’s in from ten to fifteen fathoms of water, as she may very likely be.—

TRELAWNY : That is true.—But do your best—and let me hear the result as soon as possible.—

[CAPTAIN ROBERTS *salutes and goes out.*

(*Turning to the women.*) While you, Mary—and Jane—and Claire—should return to Pisa with me at once—and get away from this place which must oppress you indescribably. . . .

MARY (*shudderingly*) : It does.—Every time I look at the hateful Sea, a Voice from within me seems to cry aloud, “This is his Grave. . . .”

JANE (*mournfully*) : And the Sirocco perpetually blows, and the waves forever moan their dirge. . . .

TRELAWNY (*businesslike*) : I will write to our Minister, Dawkins, at Florence, at once, to obtain permission from the Lucchese and Florentine authorities to allow us to do as we

wish,—and to instruct the Governor of Via Reggio to deliver their Bodies up to us.

[TRELAWNY *moves towards the Doorway Back.*

CLAIRE (*bitterly*) : To think that those who belonged to us in Life are not our own, but Public Property, in Death ! . . .

MARY (*softly*) : Sh ! . . . Claire. . . . You must not talk like that. . . . In Life he was ours—But in death he is Posterity's—and the World's. . . .

CLAIRE (*pathetically*) : And yet when he was in the World, the World knew him not.—“ He came to his own, and his own received him not ” ! . . .

MARY (*gently*) : But he was not the first—nor the last—like that, Claire.—And we should be thankful that *we* knew—and received Him—as far as we were capable—and aware——

TRELAWNY (*rapidly moving off*) : Come along, Mary.—If we are to catch this Tide in the “ Bolivar ”, you must pack a few necessities at once, and come with all speed.—

[*He goes out quickly, followed by the SAILORS.*

MARY (*following them*) : I come at once, 'Tre—and Jane with me.—But Claire we must leave to look after the Children.—(*Brokenly.*) Good-bye, my dearest Girl—(*putting her arms round CLAIRE*) and watch for his fiery Grave—as I shall do from Pisa. . . .

[CLAIRE *breaks down tempestuously as MARY turns away with JANE.*

AND THE CURTAIN COMES
SLOWLY DOWN.

ACT FIVE

SCENE IV

THE SEA-SHORE OFF VIA REGGIO,
BY THE TOWER OF MIGLIARINO
AT THE BOCCA LERIGGIO, ON THE
BORDERS OF THE TUSCAN AND LUC-
CHESSE STATES. A WEEK LATER,
AUGUST 1822

Across the Centre of the Stage a line of strong Posts and Railings project into the Sea, on the Back-Cloth, dividing the States of Tuscany and Lucca.

On the Left, is the gnarled root of a pine-tree, marking SHELLEY'S Grave. Behind this is a small pine-tree Hut, in front of which stands the LOOK-OUT MAN on Duty. A few richly-dressed LADIES and SPECTATORS are standing at the side of the Hut, watching the proceedings with interest, as an OFFICER and SOLDIERS enter, with a HEALTH OFFICER, and some DISMOUNTED DRAGOONS, carrying long-handled tongs, nippers, poles with iron hooks, spikes, etc.

In the centre walk TRELAWNY and BYRON, giving directions to the SOLDIERS.

TRELAWNY (*stopping short*) : This is the spot.—By those three white wands.—Here—set to work.—There is plenty of fuel for you.—Use these broken spars and planks cast up from other wrecks—and this fallen and decaying timber—While Lord Byron and I erect the Furnace.—

[They proceed to do so, in the Centre of Stage, as the SOLDIERS collect the fuel for the Pyre, while the HEALTH OFFICER and his MEN shovel away the sand covering the Bodies.]

SOLDIER (*as a dull thud is heard*) : Basta ! . . .
I've struck something hard with my mattock ! . . .
HEALTH OFFICER : It's probably a Skull—be careful ! . . .

[TRELAWNY and BYRON turn towards them as they find the Bodies.

BYRON (*horrifiedly*) : Is that a human Body ?
. . . Why, it's more like the carcase of a Sheep,
or any other Animal, than a Man ! . . . This
is a satire on our pride and folly !—What a
humble and degrading thought, that we shall
one day resemble this ! . . . The entrails of a
Worm hold together longer than the Potter's
Clay of which Man is made. . . . Hold !—let
me see the jaw ?—(*Kneeling down beside it as the
Soldiers uncover it.*)—I can recognise anyone by
the teeth, with whom I have talked. . . . I
always watch the lips and mouth ;—they tell
what the tongue and eyes try to conceal.

TRELAWNY (*producing a Boot*) : This Boot of
Williams' exactly corresponds with the one here.
—And the initials E. E. W. are on the black silk
handkerchief found round his neck.—So there
can be no mistake.—(*Holding up the handkerchief
again.—To the SOLDIERS.*) Here.—You can put
the rest piecemeal into the Furnace. . . .

BYRON (*shuddering*) : Don't repeat this with me
—let my Carcase rot where it falls ! . . .

OFFICER : The pyre is ready now, sir.

TRELAWNY (*lighting a torch*) : Then I will apply
the fire.—(*He does so rapidly—and the pine-wood
begins to burn fiercely.*)

BYRON (*producing it*) : And I the Frankincense
and Salt.—If it is not too hot for me to
approach—— (*He does so as the flames leap up.*)

TRELAWNY (*producing Flasks*) : It is scorching
hot.—But here's the flask of Wine and Oil—
more Wine than poor Shelley ever consumed in
his life !—— (*He does so, and the flames shoot higher.*)

BYRON (*ironically*) : The more Fool he.—But

the Greek oration must be omitted, for we have lost our Hellenic Bard. . . .

TRELAWNY : How can you say that when you are still with us ?——

BYRON (*humbly*) : My dear fellow, Shelley was a Poet,—I am only a Versifier——

OFFICER (*pantingly*) : Please sir, it is so insufferably hot that my soldiers must seek some shade. . . .

TRELAWNY (*kindly*) : By all means—Lord Byron and I will do the last offices. . . .

[*The SOLDIERS move off into Background, as BYRON and TRELAWNY draw nearer the Furnace.*

BYRON (*beseechingly*) : Will you preserve Shelley's Skull for me ? . . . It is so strikingly beautiful—although so small and thin——

TRELAWNY (*hesitatingly*) : If you swear never to profane it by using it as a drink-cup, as you once did another ? . . .

BYRON (*crossing himself*) : I swear—by all that is Holy. . . .

TRELAWNY (*peering down*) : But look—it is falling to pieces already . . . resting on the red-hot bottom bars of the furnace !—See how the brains literally seethe, bubble, and boil, as in a Cauldron !——

BYRON (*peering likewise*) : Yet look how the Heart remains entire ! . . . That, and some fragments of bone, jaw and skull alone. . . .

TRELAWNY (*bravely*) : I'll snatch it from the furnace—and preserve it for Mary—— (*He does so, burning his hand in the process.*) Ah ! . . . I've burnt myself badly.—But it's worth it, to possess the Heart of Shelley ! . . .

BYRON (*cautiously*) : Be careful—or the Health Officer will see—and put you in quarantine !——

TRELAWNY (*whispering*) : I'll hand it over to Hunt in the Carriage—and he can give it to Mary—Whilst we collect the ashes in these oak boxes. . . .

BYRON (*shuddering again*) : I can bear it no

longer.—I don't blame Hunt now for remaining in the Carriage and viewing it from afar. . . . It is more horrible than anything I ever imagined ! . . .

TRELAWNY (*looking upwards ecstatically*) : I don't agree with you—With the sea, and the Islands of Gorgona, Capraja, and Elba before us,—and those old Battlemented Watch-Towers stretching along the Coast, backed by the marble-crested Apennines glistening in the Sun,—I can imagine Shelley's spirit still soaring over us. . . .

BYRON (*desperately*) : Instead of being annihilated in that heap of ashes !—But I can stand it no longer. . . . I must cool myself in the Sea.—Come—let us try the strength of these waters, that drowned our Friends.—(*He begins to strip.*) How far do you think they were out, when their Boat sank ? . . .

TRELAWNY (*tartly*) : If you don't wish to be put into the Furnace you had better not try !—You are not in condition.

[*But unheeding, BYRON strips, and makes for the Sea in Background. TRELAWNY follows, towards the group of SOLDIERS.*]

TRELAWNY (*handing them Scudi*) : Here is a reward for the admirable way in which you have all behaved, during these last difficult days—Grazietante——

SOLDIERS (*gratefully saluting*) : Thank you, sir—thank you very much indeed.——

[*TRELAWNY then lays the two Oak boxes reverently on the sand, strips, and follows BYRON towards the back Sea-Cloth as he speaks, half to himself, as the Curtain descends.*]

TRELAWNY : We come then, Shelley, to join you, where . . .

“ Nothing of him that doth fade ; But doth
suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange. . . . ”

CURTAIN.

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